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CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Péter Marton
The Sources of Visegrad Conduct: A Comparative Analysis of V4 Foreign Policy-making ................. 7

The article presents sketches of a systemic assessment of the foreign policies of the four Visegrad countries. Its ambition is to move beyond the superficiality of merely recounting past successes and failures of V4 cooperation while rhetorically restating aspirations for a dream-world of Visegrad partnership. To this end, it applies elements of the conceptual repertoire of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) to highlight key issues structuring V4 relations and why in their foreign policies these countries do not fully “click”, or, in other words, are not capable of playing a truly meaningful role together on the world stage. The concepts of role-making, ratification, normalisation (as in prospect theory), national identities, as well as a look at the role of interest groups all have some insights to offer in this respect. The aim is to arrive at a tentative assessment of the Visegrad countries' foreign policy-making peculiarities, with the intention to illustrate the possibility of, as well as to invite further, more profound research on the subject.

András Rácz
The Greatest Common Divisor: Russia’s Role in Visegrad Foreign Policies ......................... 32

The article explores the coherence of the Visegrad’s foreign policies towards Russia, by assessing both the national positions and the role of the International Visegrad Fund. The most important common elements of the V4 countries’ Russia policies are the shared hard security interests and similar positions in energy security. The main differing factors are the missile defence project and the place of human rights on national Russia-oriented foreign policy agendas. Finally, the Russia-related activities of the International Visegrad Fund are examined and reveal only limited interest in using the V4’s sole institution to establish broader contacts with that country.

Tomáš Strážay
Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans: A Group Perspective ............. 52

The Western Balkans ranks high among the foreign policy priorities of the V4 countries and also represents one of territorial priorities of the Visegrad Group. The article aims to assess the current and future possibilities of cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans. Rather than analysing the involvement of particular V4 countries in the region, it focuses solely on the role played by the Visegrad Group as such. Besides mentioning the fields of ongoing or future cooperation, the article also focuses on the main obstacles that might prevent cooperation from developing.
Vít Střítecký


The current economic difficulties noticeably represented by the European fiscal crisis have stimulated and reinvigorated calls for deeper regional cooperation in the defence sector. Before suggesting some areas of potential cooperation, this article indicates that a large amount of resources have been wasted due to highly ineffective defence and strategic planning. This position will be confronted with arguments claiming success in the consolidation of Central Europe’s armed forces. It follows that seeking a remedy in regional cooperation will be both possible and effective only after the reforms bring about a real consolidation of national defence sectors.

Dariusz Ka³an

The End of a “Beautiful Friendship?” U.S. Relations with the Visegrad Countries under Barack Obama (2009–2013) ......................... 83

It seems that for the U.S., Central Europe has already lost the geopolitical uniqueness that captured Washington’s attention at the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s. Significant differences between the two sides regarding global threats as well as the gradual fragmentation of the region have meant the U.S. has ceased to see Central Europe from a strategic perspective and instead has focused on its more immediate economic, energy and security needs as pursued through bilateral channels. In the future, the relationship between the two may be reinforced, though only if Central Europe is able to formulate common priorities with one voice, a challenge especially for the Visegrad Group.

Patryk Kugiel

The Development Cooperation Policies of Visegrad Countries —An Unrealised Potential .......................... 101

Despite many complementarities and shared interests, the V4 countries seem more often to compete rather than collaborate in areas of international development cooperation. This paper is an attempt to trace the major similarities, analyze the stumbling blocks and show some of the ways the V4 countries can join their efforts in this area. It argues that the V4 countries can do much more together, especially in the Eastern Partnership, in which they already participate and where their transition experience is the most relevant.
Anita Sobják
Rethinking the Future of the Visegrad Group
at a Time of Heated Debate on the Future of the EU ................. 122

With the European economic crisis meaningfully reshuffling the political and economic constellations in the EU, Member State alliances have increased in significance because of the complex reform processes being undertaken. These volatile combinations create both a necessity and an opportunity for the V4 to rethink the mission of the regional grouping. A comprehensive account of V4 activity suggests that the areas in which cooperation is bearing the most fruit are energy security, civil society cooperation and policy towards the eastern and southeastern neighbours. The most effective route for the V4 is to further streamline its strategies and pool resources in policy areas with the highest potential, without the pretence of covering all areas.

REVIEWS  ●  NOTES

Philip Taubman: The Partnership: Five Cold Warriors and Their Quest to Ban the Bomb (Jacek Durkalec) .................................................. 140

Stephen Clark, Julian Priestley: Europe’s Parliament: People, Places, Politics (Agata Gostyńska) ................................. 144

László Csaba, József Fogarasi, Gábor Hunya: European Integration: First Experiences and Future Challenges (Anna Visvizi)......................................... 149

Annual list of contents .................................................. 154
The Sources of Visegrad Conduct: 
A Comparative Analysis of V4 Foreign Policy-making

Introduction

This article presents sketches of a systemic assessment of the foreign policies of the four Visegrad countries. Its ambition is to move beyond the superficiality of merely recounting past successes and failures of Visegrad Group (V4) cooperation, while rhetorically restating aspirations for a utopian Visegrad partnership. To this end it employs the conceptual repertoire of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) in order to highlight key issues shaping V4 relations and to examine why, in their foreign policies, these countries do not fully “click,” or, in other words, why they are not capable of playing a truly meaningful role together on the world stage. The concepts of role-making, ratification, normalisation (as in prospect theory), national identities and the role of interest groups all offer some insights in this respect. The aim is to arrive at a tentative assessment of the Visegrad countries’ foreign policy-making peculiarities, with the intention of illustrating and suggesting the possibility of further, more profound research on the subject. To this end, the article also offers a large number of references to guide the reader to the literature available related to the topic.

The Surface: The Institutional Context of Foreign Policy-making in the V4 Countries

All of the V4 countries are functioning democracies, scoring (as of 2010) at least eight or above on the Polity IV dataset scale (Poland, Slovakia and Hungary score ten), and qualifying as “Free” in Freedom House’s freedom of the press ratings. Less pleasantly, at the same time they fall midway between “very

1 The author wishes to express his thanks to the anonymous reviewers of this article for their useful suggestions.

2 Prospect theory, as outlined later in the text, is a model of human risk-taking propensity—how the propensity to take risks is affected by whether one perceives to be facing prospective losses or gains.

clean” and “highly corrupt” in Transparency International’s Corruption Index, as of 2011 (Poland scoring best at 5.5; Slovakia the worst at 4.0).\(^4\)

Since the beginning of the 1990s, coalition governments have been the norm in all of the V4 countries, not unexpectedly, as they are multi-party parliamentary democracies with partly or fully proportional-representation electoral systems. Especially in the Czech Republic, governments have often fallen before completing their mandate, and in all of the V4 countries governments are often voted out of power. Hungary is a unique case, as the governing party alone controls two-thirds of the seats in parliament, with the ability to use its constitutional or super-majority to change even pivotal legislation without consultation with, or consent from, other political parties—although the current Hungarian government is not the first with a two-thirds majority.\(^5\)

In all of the V4 countries, presidents as heads of state have a limited role or may be only figureheads, as in Slovakia and Hungary. In the Czech Republic and Poland the constitutions do nevertheless allow the presidents noteworthy competences, and defines their positions in such a way that at least occasionally they can shape, or intervene in, the foreign policy process—as Václav Havel’s signing of the Letter of Eight document on the eve of the Iraq War may illustrate.\(^6\)

Legislatives have varying degrees of oversight over foreign policy-making. The Czech Republic and Poland have bicameral parliaments. In the Czech case, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate jointly ratify international treaties of greater importance, as well as approving the deployment of troops abroad; the same goes for the Polish Sejm and Senate, the Slovak National Council and the Hungarian National Assembly, with some subtle differences—for example, the Slovak National Council “expresses its consent” to the deployment of the country’s troops abroad, whereas the Hungarian parliament “rules” on it.\(^7\)

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\(^5\) Between 1994 and 1998, the ruling Socialist-Liberal coalition had similar majority.


\(^7\) “Hungary: Oversight over National Defence Policy,” Inter-Parliamentary Union, www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/ConcertParlementaire/2141_F.htm#defnat; “Slovakia: Oversight over National Defence Policy,” Inter-Parliamentary Union, www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/ConcertParlementaire/2285_F.htm#defnat. Note that the legislative’s approval may not be sufficient in itself. E.g. presidents may have similar formal rights of approval: for example the Polish president approves the deployment of troops abroad as well as the extension of their mandate.
This in itself, however, does not reveal much that is essential as to the degree to which the nature of foreign policy decision-making in the V4 countries may aid, help or hinder cooperation and the fulfilment of meaningful common objectives. To the latter end, the conceptual repertoire of comparative Foreign Policy Analysis will be used in the following section in order to understand “the sources of Visegrad conduct.” Systemically relevant variables that typically affect the way these countries engage with others, including each other, on the international scene are the key to this understanding, be these variables external or domestic.

In its scope (covering all four V4 countries, and numerous issue areas and variables) this article aspires to do more than previous similar attempts (for example Büyükkakinci’s analysis of Czech and Slovak foreign policy divergence in the 1990s, and Zaborowski’s consideration of domestic factors in German–Polish relations.8

The Different Paradigms of Foreign Policy Analysis

The field of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), as a distinct field of study, developed decades ago as an “acorn” of the larger body of International Relations Theory,9 complementing the latter with a generally more actor-focused approach in the place of systemic, structural, broad-scope, long-range explanations of state behaviour: focusing on the people making the policy as opposed to the abstract “units” of IR. However, when A complements B, this may also be true in the opposite direction, and some textbooks nowadays introduce FPA as consisting of actor-focused as well as structural explanations of foreign policy behaviour.10 It is easy to sympathise with this view, as indeed FPA and IR Theory can usefully be integrated to create a paradigm for the study of the world of inter-state relations—on different levels and with different time horizons. This “paradigm” is not an ontologically, methodologically or epistemologically homogeneous body of knowledge but a paradigm in the sense

of “a set of inflectional forms:” not that of verbs of course but of interpreting some of the same phenomena depending on the level of analysis and the preferred explanatory range that one has in mind.

In essence, this is what two of the foundational sources of FPA, classical texts very often quoted up to this day, offer us, and this is exactly why they remain so influential. They are James Rosenau’s “Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy”¹¹ and Graham Allison’s “Three Cuts on the Cuban Missile Crisis.”¹²

Rosenau, whose work has already provided a basis for Büyükakinci for the study of the divergence of Czech and Slovak foreign policies in the 1990s,¹³ distinguished five analytical perspectives or sources of foreign policy, while Allison, as the title of his seminal work indicates, distinguished three different, possible cuts on it. Rosenau’s five major factors of foreign policy included the external variables (such as characteristics of the international system and what other states do), the individual characteristics of decision-makers (personality traits, values, experiences), the decision-makers’ role in the wider decision-making system that they govern or are a part of, the societal sources of foreign policy (what society thinks and what it does to influence foreign policy, as well as the traits of a society such as its level of development), and finally, governmental structure/organisation (such as the executive–legislative relationship or the system of checks and balances in a given country). Allison, for his part, took a more parsimonious approach in contrasting a rationalist or rationalising perspective on international politics, which always seeks to put state actions at least retrospectively in line with an assumed notion of the given country’s national interest, with two different analytical perspectives which he termed the Organisational Process and the Bureaucratic Politics paradigms. Through the latter he drew attention to the major role of the bureaucracy in both shaping and implementing foreign policy, and how the latter’s participation is a major factor in outcomes—through the limits of organisational repertoire and the rigidity of standard operating procedures on the one hand, and through the turf battles,

¹³ E. Büyükakinci, op. cit.
personality clashes and differences of views between leaders of different government agencies in collectively formulating policy on the other.

While seeking comparative conclusions about the nature of foreign policy-making in the V4 countries that are of relevance to their cooperation, one can seemingly exclude some of these analytical lenses from the inquiry. Decision-maker personality traits are idiosyncratic variables that seem unlikely to have a long-range, systemic effect on V4 relations, only a varying effect, from time to time. Arguably, however, they cannot be ignored altogether as the regular recurrence of a significant role played by the individual dispositions of decision-makers in V4 relations may ultimately take on a systemic quality, and has to be reckoned with as an influence generally present in the context we are examining. Nevertheless, the more structural explanations may be clearly of more relevance to us.

This study will nevertheless look for a compromise in trying to keep the focus of inquiry somewhere in-between, paying attention to decision-makers, to thus be “more FPA than IR” as one may put it. The structural aspects of the V4 relationship (their shared history, basic compatibility, and fundamental perceptions related to foreign policy) have been studied more extensively in the past and therefore an actor-focused approach may shed more new light on factors affecting V4 cooperation.

The analysis below begins by looking at whether V4 countries, or Visegrad cooperation play a certain “role” on the world stage, using insights from role theory. The discomfort relating to role-making and role-taking is connected with the problem of foreign policy ratification, the discussion of which once again offers a chance for some valuable observations. At the root of ratification challenges are different points of normalisation in different issue areas—importing a concept from prospect theory. As a general backdrop to this, national identities are also found to play an important role, which quite logically leads to the need to assess the influence, or rather the lack thereof, of some of the key societal sources of foreign policy in democratic political systems, such as interest groups and civil society.


Visegrad Countries’ Foreign Policy through Various Conceptual Lenses

**Role-making.** Research into foreign policy role conceptions stems from the simple idea that, since individuals relate to the social world around them through “roles” as they make sense to them, something similar may be at the works in the case of states. In other words, this has been the transposition of the original sociological inquiry from one level of analysis to another. More recent work on the subject does, however, seek to merge the different analytical levels. Individuals as decision-makers and decision-influencers formulate foreign policy and inter-subjectively interpret the constraints and clues for action inherent in a situation. Building on McCourt’s “Meadian interactionist approach,” they determine the processes of “role-making,” “alter-casting” and “role-taking” that produce the shifting outcome of foreign policy role conception within the framework of which a state attempts to weave its strategic course through the social context of the challenges it faces. One may add that roles can be formulated in different ways at different times for the same situation, exactly because of the strategic nature of the exercise: the need to please, inform, neutralise or deter various different audiences.

In the case of the Visegrad countries, this collective mediation of role conception may set them apart as well as unite them at times, depending on the foreign policy decision-making context. Focusing in particular on their engagement on the global stage, similarities may be discovered in the uncertainty and fluidity of their role conceptions.

For example, standing on the threshold of EU accession and at the same time on the eve of the 2003 Iraq War, these countries took on the role of balancing, band-wagoning and bridging at the same time, to thus shape Euro-Atlantic relations, as one study notes. In trying to make an important gesture towards the U.S. (in the “Letter of Eight” and the Vilnius letter), even as they sought to downplay the significance of this, they revealed their historically shaped identity of being desperate, relatively small powers on the world stage, badly in need of an evenly secure and friendly milieu around them. They were very

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uncomfortable with both the “New Europeans [who loyally follow the U.S.]”\textsuperscript{18} label attached to them in U.S. circles, most notably by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and the “irrelevant European countries [that should know when to shut up]”\textsuperscript{19} role conception forcefully suggested to them by the likes of French President Jacques Chirac.

It may also be noteworthy how three of the Visegrad countries, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary, but to a lesser extent also Poland, in spite of being cast in the role of “senior (New) European Atlanticist,”\textsuperscript{20} cling to a “peacekeeper” role, regularly expressed in official rhetoric, even in the context of NATO’s Afghanistan mission. As a form of alter-casting, this is directed at key domestic as well as external target audiences: voters ill-disposed to support expeditionary military operations on the one hand, and general Middle Eastern as well as local Afghan audiences who should theoretically appreciate such nuances of role conception and be less hostile to these countries’ presence on the other hand. Such a role conception persists even in the face of objections and criticism by allied partner countries; a good example may be Hungary’s recent exchange of messages with the government of New Zealand over the nature of Hungary’s exact mandate in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{21} It persists also in spite of other, at

\textsuperscript{18} With reference to Donald Rumsfeld’s statement as quoted in: P. Kiss, “Eastern European Defense Review: Two Defense Secretaries and the ‘New Europe’,” CSIS, 28 June 2011. See: http://csis.org/blog/eastern-european-defense-review-two-defense-secretaries-and-new-europe. In the original form: „you are thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don’t. I think that’s old Europe … If you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the centre of gravity is shifting to the east. And there are a lot of new members.”

\textsuperscript{19} With reference to Jacques Chirac’s statement, as quoted in: “Conférence de presse de Monsieur Jacques Chirac, Président de la République, à l’issue de la réunion informelle extraordinaire du Conseil européen, Bruxelles,” Le Monde Diplomatique, 17 February 2003. In the original form: “Entering the European Union presupposes a minimal consideration for others, a minimum of concert [between countries] … I think these countries missed a good chance to remain silent.”


\textsuperscript{21} New Zealand’s Prime Minister, John Key, suggested that Hungary does not respect that its role in Baghlan province, Afghanistan, should be to guarantee security in all of that area, including by nighttime patrols—and that this is why troops from New Zealand were killed in neighbouring Bamiyan province in an incident. In his statement, Prime Minister Key revealed a misunderstanding of several fundamental aspects of the existing order of battle in Afghanistan. Nevertheless the demanding of a more aggressive approach by a partner country and Hungary’s response that it is there in Afghanistan only in a peacekeeping role itself revealed a staunchly misplaced definition of the context of Hungary’s mission and the country’s role in it. See: I. Davison, “Hungarians Hurt by ‘Snide’ Key Dig at Troops,” NZ Herald, 8 August 2012; D. Levy, V. Small, “Afghanistan Attack: No Pressure on Hungary,” Stuff.co.nz, 7 August 2012.
times nominally conflicting, roles articulated in specific contexts: e.g. that as “loyal allies” these countries themselves often say they are “fighting” terrorism in Afghanistan.

More recently, V4 countries struggled to defend a position of staying out of air operations in Libya. All of the V4 countries did so, and while Poland expressed its opposition more confidently, the Czech Republic and Hungary only tried to argue that their role is irrelevant, that combat is not expected of them, and that they are only expected to contribute to Allied efforts in other ways. Role insecurity while playing the role of “good transatlantic allies” and “good Europeans” as well as, at the same time, the role of “harmless small countries,” along with a degree of “role escapism” resulting from this on the global stage (for example in Afghanistan, as previously noted), is thus a common trait of V4 countries from time to time, especially as far as the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia are concerned.

An additional, interesting question may stem from the research agenda related to role conceptions. Once it is acknowledged that it is not really states that breed role conceptions, but people claiming with various authority and legitimacy to think, speak and act on behalf of states, it is but one step to apply this insight to any role conceived of as a purpose of Visegrad cooperation, too.

When V4 cooperation started, its aim was the “‘coordination of policies’ and ‘synchronisation of steps’ on the road to Europe” and to be “a device to support V4 EU and NATO entry.”\(^{22}\) Gniazdowski concludes that Visegrad functioned in effect as a relatively well-selling brand.\(^ {23}\) At the May 1992 Krakow meeting of the Visegrad group, the final document declared NATO membership to be the ultimate goal of these countries.\(^ {24}\) Currently, in the wake of accession, Visegrad countries are interested to varying degrees in uniting their influence over EU policy to shape the Union’s approach towards eastern partners, within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership. In practice, Visegrad cooperation’s “role … has been to endorse and advocate … other initiatives and to facilitate policy alliances with other EU states seeking to


\(^{23}\) M. Gniazdowski, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

gain advantages for the eastern dimension of ENP.”

Importantly, however, as Dangerfield notes, not even the Eastern Partnership was proposed from within the V4 mechanism. Small wonder—as individual V4 countries pick rather selectively from the menu of the Eastern Partnership, too. For example, Hungary is interested mostly in three of the eastern partners (Moldova, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan), and even a notion of “the east” means different things for Hungarian decision-makers than for their Polish counterparts.

Visegrad countries have an equally uncertain approach to the promotion of democracy and universal human rights, in spite of the experience supposedly uniting them as transition countries with unambiguous value orientations in this respect. Both Slovakia and Hungary experimented with pleasing China, for instance, by at times ignoring human rights issues altogether in their relations with the emerging power, hoping to improve their chances of beneficial partnership.

Even today a valid research question may be to ask whether role-making or role-taking (by actors external to Visegrad) is more dominant as far as the Visegrad group as a whole is concerned. In this sense it is interesting to observe initiatives such as the planned Visegrad combined battlegroup, for instance. Which is more important here? Visegrad countries continued striving for acclaim as “good allies” by contributing to the cause of smart defence within NATO, or external actors’ continued efforts to convince them to do so?

Ratification. Roles that V4 countries may be uneasy with come with a price regularly paid in various ways—something Foreign Policy Analysis is deeply interested in: the burden of ratification. This implies the political costs, mechanisms and bargaining related to the acceptance or the explicit, formal or informal, approval by domestic actors of any international agreement or, for example, the expressed readiness on the part of decision-makers to do something on the part of a state in line with the wishes of other states. In Putnam’s original expression this is a “two-level” game, taking place in the context of international

and domestic politics—in reality, as case-study research has since amply
evidenced this, the bargaining takes place on multiple levels at the same time.  

An analysis of the politics of ratification can provide interesting insights
regarding constituent interests, negotiating strategies, interest perceptions and
value orientations on the parts of different players involved in, or affected by,
major foreign policy decisions or international agreements. Such decisions and
commitments require legislative as well as social support to at least some degree
in all cases, including, merely as an example, military cooperation with NATO
allies even at home—see, for example, Rácz’s consideration of Hungary’s policy
on NATO missile defence in this respect.  

Case studies dealing with such issues need to map the role of the key
institutional voices and veto players—legislatures and factions therein, cabinet
members, presidents (be they mere figureheads or not), constitutional courts,
central banks, and anyone else with granted or gained influence in a matter. Such
inquiry needs also to focus on the role and effect of public opinion, the media
and interest groups.

Possible examples and case study material abound. Without providing a full
inventory here, a few illustrative examples may be worth considering.

– From the 1990s, Hungary’s adoption of so-called “Basic Treaties” with its
neighbours, including provisions for minority protection which generated
conflictual domestic politics in the countries concerned even as the signing of
the treaties was praised as a token of stability internationally—in Hungary, the
most heated debate surrounded the Basic Treaties with Slovakia in 1995, and
with Romania in 1996, both of these signed by the Socialist-Liberal Hungarian
government of Prime Minister Gyula Horn, and criticised as insufficient
guarantees of minority rights by the rightist opposition.

– Before joining NATO in 1999, Hungary held a referendum about
accession, seeking to ratify it directly. The majority (85.33%) voted “yes” at this

28 R.D. Putnam, “Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two Level Games,”


30 See e.g. G. Jeszenszky, “A magyar külpolitika fő irányai a század utolsó évtizedében,” in:
P. Pritz (ed.), *Magyarország helye a 20. századi Európában*, Magyar Történelmi Társulat,
Budapest, 2002, pp. 169–184, and P. Dunay, “Hungarian Foreign Policy in the Era of
referendum but in advance the voter participation threshold had to be lowered to 25% for a valid ballot (turnout was indeed slightly less than 50% in the end), which the government could manage by modifying the constitution fielding a “salad law” (containing various unrelated last-minute pieces of legislation) in parliament.\footnote{“Lesz-e népszavazás? Rizikó nélkül,” Magyar Narancs, 5 April 2012.}

– The Slovak government of Vladimir Meciar, not really standing a chance of being invited to join NATO at the time, made the issue a part of domestic politics by holding a referendum on accession along with other questions, one of which was unrelated (the question concerning the possible direct election of the President of the Slovak Republic), some of which were in fact designed to manipulate the vote to obtain a “no” on accession (such as the questions about whether foreign military bases or nuclear weapons should be accepted in Slovak territory). In 2003, anti-NATO activists failed to submit a petition with a sufficient number of signatures to have a referendum on NATO accession on the same day when the EU referendum vote was due to take place.\footnote{K. Henderson, “Referendum No. 7—The Slovak EU Accession Referendum, 16–17 May 2003,” EPERN, www.sussex.ac.uk/sei/documents/epern-ref-no-7.pdf, p. 6.}

– In 2003, when it came to the controversial deployment to Iraq, Visegrad countries faced different hurdles in ratifying a policy of lending the U.S. diplomatic support and participating in American-led operations there. In Hungary, specific rules regarding military deployment had existed since 2003, whereby two-thirds majority support in parliament was necessary for non-NATO missions (which in practice required an all-party consensus at the time of the deployment), while the government’s decision was enough to sanction NATO deployments; predictably, two-thirds majority support was soon lost in the case of the initial deployment to Iraq.\footnote{This simplification of decision-making related to NATO deployments (that a government decision be enough regarding these) was in part the result of NATO pressure: upon NATO’s Colorado Springs ministerial meeting where a NATO Response Force decision-making exercise pointed out the especially cumbersome nature of Hungary’s decision-making.}

– EU accession in 2004 was approved to varying degrees in different regions within the individual V4 countries—Artun analyses data related to why Podlasie along with other regions of Poland produced a comparatively low voter turnout and a similarly lower ratio of “yes” votes.\footnote{A. Artun, “Regional Perceptions of Foreign Policy: Eastern Poland,” Perspectives on European Politics and Society, vol. 6, no. 1, 2005, p. 3.}
In 2005, Poland and the Czech Republic cancelled referenda on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, once the ratification process had already foundered in France and the Netherlands that year; Hungary’s and Slovakia’s parliaments had, prior to this, approved the document, without the need for similar approval from their publics.

In 2009, the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon eventually prompted an opt-out by the Czech Republic from the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU because of concerns about the legal standing of the Benes decrees; President Klaus, Senators, and the Constitutional Court played a key role in the domestic political struggle related to this.  

Earlier in the same year, in March 2009 the government of Czech Premier Mirek Topolánek lost a confidence vote by the narrowest of margins in parliament, during the country’s presidency of the EU council—an example of extreme problems in the foreign–domestic policy nexus.

More recently, one may recall the fall of the Slovak coalition government in October 2011, when the majority of the Slovak National Council passed a motion of no confidence, thus rejecting approval of the expanded European Financial Stability Facility and Slovakia’s contribution to it (albeit only temporarily).

Currently, the fate of a major IMF deal continues to hang in the balance in Hungary, after many twists and turns in an already long drawn-out negotiation process about a stand-by facility which the EU effectively made conditional upon measures it saw as necessary to guarantee central bank autonomy, the rule of law, and institutional stability. The Orban government, for its part, organised mass protests in favour of its adamant approach to these negotiations.

That the ratification of foreign policy was either cumbersome or unsuccessful on these occasions can be viewed, on the one hand, as a natural sign of ordinary, healthy democratic politics. A structural perspective does, however, connect this with the role insecurity discussed before. Overall, throughout their transition processes, Visegrad countries had to make painful adjustments to new realities. Economically, European integration offered clear

prospective benefits, but came at the price of a troublesome transformation in various sectors, for example in agriculture. Key industries suffered losses, were wiped out or were taken over by competition through liberalised trade and investment with Western Europe, including even the more advanced Czech industries. Large armed forces needed to be downsized even as the same leaner but meaner force structure became an expectation with NATO accession, and was becoming a norm for others in the process of military transformation too. Along with the latter, a readiness, if not an appetite, for foreign military missions was also politely expected and demanded, and a latently often isolationist public, was not really willing to support such measures. These small states faced further policy complications as they had to face a “multi-pronged” need to ratify their foreign policies in the process of their global engagement, which included the need to conform to conflicting external demands that would have been ill-advised to refute given the prospect of likely damage to key strategic relations. Marton charted the course of Hungary through these challenges in the decade from 2001 to 2011—in fact, the other Visegrad countries’ experiences and resulting trajectories were in many respects similar, too, for example in the context of the debates surrounding the Iraq War. Particularly notable as a document of this may be the Summer 2009 letter by Central European intellectuals to President Obama, in which they asked for his “full engagement” in Europe in return for “[convincing] our societies to adopt a more global perspective.”

A particularly interesting case study of ratification politics is one which is of relevance to fundamental aspects of the relationship between two of the V4 countries, namely, Hungary and Slovakia: the failure to work out a compromise (or an “overlap in win-sets”) over the joint use of the river Danube for the production of hydro-electricity. Put briefly, one aspect of Deets’ study that may carry the present inquiry forward is his focus on how differences over the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros project eventually coalesced into contrasting state

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identities and is perpetuated by very different points of “normalisation” between the two countries.\footnote{Deets concludes that for Hungary a notion of what is normal belongs to the past, and is seen as in need of being restored (that is, the old state of the river Danube), whereas for Slovakia it is the new reality of the existing Gabčíkovo dam and the current course of the river Danube that is normal—albeit with the building of a Hungarian dam the situation could be further improved (to which level they would be happy to re-normalise).}

**Normalisation.** The notion of normalisation comes from the political-psychology school of the study of decision-making and its insights regarding patterns of human propensity for risk-taking.\footnote{See in: J.S. Levy, “Political Psychology and Foreign Policy,” in: D. Sears, L. Huddy, R. Jervis (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, pp. 253–284.} According to prospect theory, the latter is fundamentally affected by whether individuals perceive themselves to be in the domain of losses or gains, or in other words, whether they see themselves as winning or losing. This, in turn, has to be calculated in relation to a certain benchmark, or point of normalisation, against which changes in one’s situation can be measured. Gains are quickly normalised, losses, however, are accepted much more slowly.

This may offer us some insights regarding V4 foreign policy-making, if we consider where such points of normalisation may lay in the fundamentally important areas of defence and the economy (the latter in relation to European integration).

In respect to the latter, or to welfare in particular, a plausible assumption may be that V4 publics have normalised to a point which they have yet to reach. Existential security scores high among ordinary people’s security concerns, and their aspiration is to catch up with general European living standards, perceived as robbed from them by the experiment with state socialism. This catching-up process has already produced much frustration in and of itself, as “competition states” emerged across the region, and tried to secure employment, welfare and competitiveness through the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment without a particularly well thought-out cost/benefit calculus related to investment promotion measures which they saw as necessary.\footnote{J. Drahokoupil, “The Investment-Promotion Machines: The Politics of Foreign Direct Investment Promotion in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 60, no. 2, March 2008, pp. 197–225.} The economic growth of the last two decades has produced brighter patches in terms of public satisfaction at
different points in time in the individual Visegrad countries according to the economic conjuncture of the day, but with the recent economic crisis and with the uneven benefits of the transformation that has taken place, people’s prospects may be changing for the worse once again, and earlier expectations are being revised by many as adjustment becomes necessary down to the last individual and household. In Böröcz and Sarkar’s drastic formulation, “the logic of world economic adjustment for post-socialist societies is organised around wage levels hardly guaranteeing the reproduction of the labour force and the relegation of the local state to irrelevance as a dual ‘competitiveness factor’.”

Related to defence matters, V4 publics may have normalised to the regaining of independence and the departure of foreign, i.e. Soviet troops from their territories. Long-held aspirations came to be realised in this way, and the point of normalisation may in some cases have become “no foreign troops on our soil / being left alone,” with the lack of enthusiasm this carries to combat operations in foreign lands and to fighting insurgents in their home countries. Poland may however be an exception among the V4 specifically in terms of welcoming a foreign military presence, given its relationship to Russia in the past which has often seen tensions. Consequently, even a small U.S. presence is seen as a token of commitment by many there.

An example of how the location of such points of normalisation comes into interaction with deeper layers of these countries’ identities, beneath the surface of situational roles, may be the case of Russo-Polish relations. In Fedorowicz’s account, throughout the 1990s, Poland expected that Russia would apologise for the Katyn massacre and better acknowledge the Red Army’s role in the occupation of Poland in 1939, only to see Russia stop short of this in this said period. Poles were ready to normalise only contingent on a Russian apology, but Russia had re-normalised with the end of the Soviet Union, and opined that it bore no direct responsibility for the deeds of Stalin. In Agnew’s words, it is in

45 J.H. Svan, “USAFE to Establish First U.S. Aviation Detachment in Poland This Year,” Stars and Stripes, 14 February 2012.
such ways that “history continues to cast a long shadow over the region.” Indeed, the entire region, as many other similar examples could be mentioned.

**State and national identities.** The most important implications of state identities functioning as deeper-laying sources of foreign policy role conceptions arise out of the fact that these are often majority-national identities in the cases of Visegrad countries, leaving less room than would be desired for the articulation of subaltern or minority narratives and concerns, including those about foreign policy. A case in point may be Hungary’s collective memory of the Holocaust, which denies the true extent of the complicity of the Hungarian state in what happened—with the corresponding narrative of events drowned out by the dominant narrative of Hungarian victimhood during the Second World War. As Agnew observes, majoritarian state identity formation has been the case even in the Czech Republic where, with the deeply rooted idea of the legacy of the Bohemian state: “it would be tempting to argue that the reliance on the historical, legal and political traditions of a previous state, especially a state in which others lived as well, makes the acceptance of a civic form of national identity much easier,” but in the clash of the “the civic principle, as opposed to the ‘temptations of the national state’,” one cannot ignore the basic significance of the fact that “Czechs’ ‘housemates’ had been removed from their home.” He concludes, therefore, that by the 19th century, “into the old wineskin of Bohemian state rights, they [Czech nationalists] poured the new wine of Czech ethnic nationalism.”

Historically, in the wider region of Central and Eastern Europe, two overall contrasting tendencies have been at work since the dissolution of the four empires that used to control these lands (Russian, Ottoman, Habsburg/Austro-Hungarian, Prussian/German). One exerts an effect towards desired stability (or, with reference to what has been said before: normalisation) through ethnic homogeneity (think of the

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48 Such as, for but one, the continued mobilisation of Sudeten Germans against the Beneš decrees which ordered their expulsion from Czechoslovakia after World War Two. Their collective interest group, the *Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft* was active even in trying to impede the Czech Republic’s accession to the European Union. To state the obvious, Sudeten Germans have normalised to a different point than the Czech state.


population transfers and exchanges as well as the genocides of the past here), another towards stability through inclusivity, and the guarantee of human and minority rights. While in the last two decades there has generally been a commitment to moving in the latter direction, the ethno-centric impulse exists and has come to the fore on various occasions, in various forms. One example is when Slovak Premier Vladimír Mečiar decided to redraw his country’s administrative units so as to leave significantly reduced political influence with ethnic Hungarians, while also redoubling efforts at their cultural assimilation. Or, for that matter, in widespread anti-Roma discrimination, from the Czech Republic to Hungary.

National identities can also be a direct source of conflicts of interest as well as being at the root of major differences of views. The former may be exemplified from August 2009 by how former Hungarian President László Sólyom felt it was natural for him as a Hungarian citizen to visit the handover ceremony for a statue of Saint Stephen, Hungary’s first crowned king (who used to rule over some of today’s Slovakia’s territory, too), in Rev-Komarom/Komarno, without the formalities (and the announcement of) an official head of state visit—something to which the Slovak side objected. Regarding differences of views over developments elsewhere, a strategically very significant, and polarising, decision was the recognition, or rejection thereof, of Kosovo’s independent statehood. With obvious concern about the setting of unwanted precedents, on behalf of Slovakia, Mikuláš Dzurinda opposed the “unilateral secession of any European country.” In contrast, Hungary only waited to recognise Kosovo in order not to antagonise Serbs in areas where they live together with ethnic Hungarians, but never really had any doubts as to whether recognition should be extended. At the same time, the Polish executive was divided, and Polish President Lech Kaczyński used the powers he had to express dissatisfaction with the government’s decision on recognition by promising not to approve the sending of an Ambassador to Prishtina—he may have considered Georgia (as an ally of Poland, with Russia in mind), and the separatist entities there, to be his primary concern in not supporting the accomplishment of Kosovo’s secession.

53 Quoted by Sláviková, ibidem.
54 Ibidem. This, on the other hand, is useful as illustration and as an argument against essentialist interpretations of national identity. Different Polish actors interpreted Polish interest differently based upon different considerations.
Conflicting manifestations of national identity encounter criticism from Western European, U.S. and other sources, and this enhances the belief on the part of certain segments of Visegrad publics that the deal the West offers is not good enough in certain respects, leading, along with other factors, to the production and the manifestation of certain, mostly nationalist, forms of anti-Western ideological resistance.

Ideological sources of foreign policy. Major foreign policy divergence is possible when leaders, who do not subscribe to the mainstream Western teleological view of history, or are sceptical about it, and, moreover, in its stead may harbour a nationalist-orientated, alternative ideology as the basis of their thinking, come to power. They can cause deviations from a fully Western-orientated foreign policy path.

To give room to contrarian perspectives, some see the role of “true believer Atlanticists” as crucial in keeping Central and Eastern European countries from sailing on the side of the west. Mikulova talks about how the decision on the part of various Central and Eastern European countries to support regime change in Iraq may have been crucially influenced by networks of “Atlanticist” thinkers whom she describes as “supporters of U.S.-led democratic globalism,” with special regard to the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Empirically identifying Atlanticists and non-Atlanticists seems to be a questionable and elusive task, however.55 Schaller, for instance, did not find the emergence of a coherent “neo-conservative” or other, similar discourse in the case of former Czech anti-communist dissenters,56 whilst Waisova and Piknerova talk, instead of Atlanticism, of a “dissident tradition” of Czech foreign policy related to the promotion of human rights.57 In Hynek and Strytecki’s assessment, “keen supporters of the USA have a majority only in the wholly pro-American (and Euro-sceptic) right-wing Civic Democratic Party [in the Czech Republic]. Apart from this party, staunch U.S. advocates form isolated cells at best.”58 It is also interesting to consider that the seemingly strongly varying influence of Atlanticist networks may not be the most plausible explanation of why so many

55 K. Mikulova, op. cit.
57 S. Waisová, L. Piknerová, “Twenty Years After: Dissident Tradition in Czech Foreign Policy Matters,” East European Politics and Societies, published online before print on 8 April 2011.
different Central and Eastern European countries made similar decisions at the same time.

Major ideological shifts in Central and Eastern European countries’ foreign policy tend to come not in synchronicity, i.e. in all of the V4 countries at the same time—they are the result of idiosyncratic factors, and therefore lead to the occasional sighting of stray sheep rather than a breakaway herd. These stray sheep may then be led back to the herd under the power of incentives, sanctions and diplomatic pressure on the part of the EU, primarily, which otherwise may also be illustrative of the weak integrity of the V4 pack itself. The role of major ideological shifts upon new leaders’ coming to power also highlights the general significance of changes of government in Visegrad countries. These can result in major foreign policy shifts in and of themselves. Such shifts also have a bearing on the points of normalisation previously mentioned. Different political parties form different preferences over what level of welfare should be achieved and how it should be distributed across layers of society, or to what extent the country should take part in alliance burden-sharing.

An important example of a major ideological detour, from the 1990s, is Vladimír Mečiáš’s government’s geopolitically contextualised ideological justification for not pursuing European integration too eagerly in the 1990s, and for his very friendly course towards Moscow. Some authors describe this as a form of “geopolitical exceptionalism” on his part, and explain the pro-Russian tilt largely with reference to domestic factors, i.e. Mečiaš’s need to find support for an illiberal polity and an at times ultra-nationalist line which he thus indirectly rationalised as a contrarian perspective. In the Czech Republic’s and Poland’s case Václav Klaus’ generally more Euro- and Atlanto-sceptical political views and Lech Kaczyński’s at times strongly anti-Russian stance may also be mentioned as having been out of line with western countries’ expectations. Klaus had reservations about the Iraq War, but at the same time he also viewed the EU as dysfunctional in many respects. Kaczyński, for his part, regarded the EU as a Europe of nations, and not a loving family of nations at that, preferring the preservation of national autonomy rather than any federalist tendency. Robert

59 E.g. the EU played a role in limiting how far Mečiaš went in curbing minority rights.
60 See e.g.: M.J. Baun, D. Marek, “Czech Foreign Policy and EU Integration: European and Domestic Sources,” Perspectives on European Politics and Society, vol. 11, no. 1, April 2010, pp. 2–21.
Fico’s first government (2006–2010) in Slovakia was a borderline case: there was no ideological turn away from the West, but with the inclusion of Ján Slota, at the head of the SNS party (Slovenska narodna strana, or Slovak National Party), who was a key figure already behind the Mečiar government’s ultra-nationalist leanings, radical anti-Hungarian views were bound to receive more attention and influence, and Slovak foreign policy suffered from the fallout as a result this.

Currently it is Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán who is, similarly to Mečiar, looking towards the east while seeking to consolidate his party’s dominance of Hungarian politics through a series of constitutional and other measures which became possible with the two-thirds parliamentary majority he and his party won in the 2010 elections. Orbán is very vocal about re-laying the ideological foundations of Hungarian foreign policy. Speaking to the currently serving Hungarian Ambassadors in August 2012, he declared: “Hungarian foreign policy won’t be good by being like western foreign policy.” Elsewhere he emphasised the need to take up “key conflicts” with the European Union, of which he clearly tends to think in terms of a Europe of often rival nations, as “they want to do things we don’t want to do.” On the same occasion, reflecting the logic of Putnam’s scheme of the politics of the two-level game, he said that although the European Union wants to force certain measures, they could “only do that through domestic politics, if there is instability. But in the next two years [of this government’s mandate] there will be anything but that. The two-thirds majority is rock solid.”

Nevertheless his negotiations with the EU and the IMF have in fact been more difficult than this statement may suggest, and Orbán openly stated on various occasions that deception is a necessary tactic in these talks: “We have to perform this dance of the peafowl of rejection as though we would be interested in making friends,” he said. In his opinion, a zig-zag course is what it will take for “us” to eventually “go our own way.” It is this, the “we” behind the “us,” or the collective self, which Orbán himself defines looking to the east more than before. In his view, “it is no longer enough to take a look at what the west is doing and to simply copy it. History has kicked these crutches from under our feet.” As he stated on

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64 Ibidem.

65 Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s5gzvb87ZY.

another, earlier occasion, “Eastern winds are blowing.”\textsuperscript{67} He is thus also intent on redefining Hungarian foreign policy along the lines of the old question of whether Hungary, as a small country, should “dare be small” (that is, look for a harmonious milieu even at the price of abandoning certain interests) or if it should “dare be big” rather (that is, abandon an harmonious Euro-Atlantic milieu for the sake of pursuing certain important-enough interests).\textsuperscript{68} His answer sounds confident: “Hungary has grown. Like lung in a pot, it is swelling.”\textsuperscript{69} It also needs to be added, nevertheless, that for Premier Orbán this does not preclude cooperation with V4 partners—to the contrary, while looking to make Hungarian foreign policy more assertive in certain respects, he is also interested in promoting Visegrad cooperation, as the country’s recent strategic documents suggest.\textsuperscript{70}

At the same time, it is currently interesting to observe the confidence of other Central and Eastern European politicians in openly and at times vocally criticising certain western policies: for example the intervention in Libya last year. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk asked: “Although there exists a need to defend civilians from a regime’s brutality, isn’t the Libyan case yet another example of European hypocrisy?”\textsuperscript{71} Bulgarian Prime Minister Boiko Borisov went further and bluntly stated: “Petrol and who will exploit Libya’s oil fields are to a great extent the interests behind this operation.”\textsuperscript{72} Ironically, Western observers have, in a rather misplaced way, berated “New Europe” in return for being “inconsistent” in not supporting armed democratisation and interventionism once they have in the past supported similar efforts in Iraq.\textsuperscript{73} This may be the first assumed sighting by Westerners of a stray herd in Central and Eastern


\textsuperscript{68} The “question” is framed here in Kiss’s formulation, as in L.J. Kiss, “The Restatement of Hungarian Foreign Policy—from Kádárism to EU Membership,” \textit{Foreign Policy Review [Külügyi Szemle]}, vol. 2, no. 1, 2004, p. 73.

\textsuperscript{69} Prime Minister Orbán’s speech at the Tranzit Festival, also quoted in G. Plankó (22 August 2012, \textit{op. cit.}).

\textsuperscript{70} “Magyar külpolitika az uniós elnökség után [Hungarian foreign policy after the EU presidency],” A Magyar Köztársaság Külföldiügyminisztériuma [Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs], 2011, pp. 35–36.


\textsuperscript{72} \textit{Ibidem}.

Europe, surprising western observers exactly as a result of herd-like loyalty in earlier foreign policy undertakings in Kosovo or Iraq for example.

**Elitism v. interest groups, civil society, public opinion, and academia.** It is worth noting the above outlined ideological influences on foreign policy-making. Beyond their regular recurrence, there is something else of systemic relevance in their background: the effects of the generally elitist policy formulation process in Visegrad countries. There is seemingly little room for the none-too-extensive independent and organised civil society that exists in these countries in setting the agenda of foreign policy, or for leading the framing of issues or even in accelerating or slowing down the implementation of specific foreign policies; the kind of effects that scholars of the media–foreign policy interaction generally expect.\(^{74}\) For but one example, Artun writes of Poland’s case, in a study of EU-related aspects of Polish foreign policy and its effect on eastern parts of Poland that “in Poland concerns of the regions still have a very limited relevance for and influence on foreign policy makers.”\(^{75}\)

Exceptions can be quoted, too: such was the success by 2010 of the environmentalist movement in Hungary in killing plans for the establishment of a NATO radar site in the Mecsek mountains (either on Mount Zengo or Mount Tubes) in southern Hungary, based on plant-conservation-related concerns.\(^{76}\) Notably, however, crucial to the movement’s success was their winning support from Hungarian President László Sólyom, including his active participation\(^ {77}\) in demonstrations against the construction of the radar facility. Elitist policy formulation otherwise benefits the influence of elite networks and the ideas promoted through them. Within such a context, NGOs have influence over policy preference formation only through “semi-institutionalised and ad hoc access points.”\(^ {78}\)

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\(^{76}\) The Mecsek mountains are home to various rare species of plants. One of them is the Banat subspecies of common peony (*Paeonia officinalis subsp. banatica*), which has become a symbol of concerns that the construction and use of the radar site would have presented a risk to these species, ill-founded as these concerns were. See: “Zengőn van a radar helye,” *Reális Zöldek Klub*, 13 March 2011.


This closed-off, elitist nature of the policy process explains the sometimes ideologically shifting foreign policies of countries in the region. Lobbying and interest groups play a role mostly in the form of foreign investors’ powerful external influence on the policy process, and in the form of what is often backdoor access by domestic and other special interests. Wider societal influence appears at the time of elections in the form of elites’ transient responsiveness to certain issues resonating with the public: both nationalist and welfare populism is manifest on these occasions.

It is therefore in the absence of something that we may identify a comparatively significant factor in Visegrad countries’ foreign policy-making: in the lack of a critically large, self-organising transnational civil society movement involved in promoting the idea of regional cooperation specifically for the Visegrad region. Recently, the old Atlanticist organisations have rallied in favour of the programme of Smart Defence, but they do not mobilise wide-spread grassroots support for the cause of Visegrad cooperation to this end.

This is not to say that transnational civil society does not extend to the Visegrad countries—to the contrary. However, just as in the case of states there are multiple different, only partially overlapping fora of cooperation, beside the—in the case of Visegrad countries—all-encompassing European Union, transnational civil society is not contained within, nor is it defined by, the external borders of a “Visegrad region.” Put in the language of network theory, in the super-network of interstate and transnational networks in which these countries are embedded, the V4 network would certainly not score the highest in terms of betweeness centrality. In other words, it is never necessarily the central or most important network. There is, on the one hand, a host of organisations and fora such as the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Central European Initiative (containing all of the V4) or the Weimar Triangle, and, on the other hand, other non-governmental organisations with cross-border links. Network pluralism makes the importance of a given network more dependent on idiosyncratic factors, such as the perceptions and vision of a given head of state or (in the case of Visegrad countries, mostly) head of government.

In the place of a grassroots pro-Visegrad civil society movement, academia could possibly represent a consistent force in favour of closer cooperation. This would depend on two things: firstly, the formation of a consensus, often referred
to as “knowledge stabilisation,”

around the subject, and, secondly, on whether or not academia (including think tanks) has influence over the policy process. Knowledge stabilisation these days may be plausibly claimed to have occurred, as the imperatives of V4 cooperation in an age of austerity are fairly clear to policy-makers and scholars alike—and scholars do see the rationality of pooling and sharing resources within formations such as the V4. There is scepticism, of course, and a warning of practical difficulties in realising ambitions, but there is a willingness to make suggestions as to how to work around these issues. However, with individual exceptions, academics tend not to have much institutionalised influence over the policy process in Visegrad countries. No “revolving door” exists, even as there are some important policy entrepreneurs who may have built parallel careers in administration and academia, with an on-and-off sort of role within these two different realms.

This state of affairs is not helped by the V4’s lingua franca being English, even if English is clearly the best choice there is. Inevitable as its use as the primary working language may be, English is still a language that is not spoken truly well by many in the older generations of academia and by many politicians and decision-makers, either.

Having said that, the increasingly regular cooperation of foreign policy think tanks in the region is an encouraging sign which could point in the right direction. The International Visegrad Fund’s positive role also has to be noted in this respect, and may in the future be crucial to making academia’s role more relevant to policy-makers and the foreign policy bureaucracy, perhaps with instruments created specifically for this purpose.

Conclusion

As a tentative first assessment of its subject, the most important objective of this article was to highlight how certain systemically relevant features of foreign policy-making in the Visegrad Four can be identified using the conceptual repertoire of Foreign Policy Analysis—to invite debate and further research on the subject.

79 Deets, op. cit., p. 40, describes such a state as the condition whereby “issues are authoritatively defined, ways to reduce scientific uncertainty are set out, and parties chart a specific path for rational resolution.” I use the term in a broader sense, referring to a condition where sufficiently strong consensus exists regarding the fundamental wisdom of something.
The preliminary diagnosis seems to be that the V4 lack a well-formulated, genuinely “made,” and (by partners) well-received role of their own on the global stage, both as individual countries and collectively. This may be partly down to ratification challenges in the field of defence and the economy, explained in this article with reference to points of normalisation in people’s conception of the world around them. This stems from, as well as it translates into, state identities that are at the same time by default majoritarian—ethno-centric, even as they appear to be strongly shaped by European and Atlanticist values—with only occasional deviations from this by individual members of the V4 according to the ideological taste of their leadership of the day. Finally, the importance of the latter ideological influences is explained in part based on a consideration of the role, or rather the lack thereof, played by interest groups and academia in the policy process. Any research addressing these or other conclusions of this article may be welcome. In particular, more interest would be justified in the nexus of academia and policy-making, to offer recommendations, to both sender and receiver, as to how academia’s work could be more useful to and relied on by policy-makers at the same time. More public polling of foreign policy attitudes would also be valuable, as at least partly it is disinterest in such measuring of public opinion that itself perpetuates the highly selective relevance of societal input in the generally elitist policy process. The availability of more verifiable knowledge about public attitudes would aid even academia in making itself more relevant.
The Greatest Common Divisor: Russia’s Role in Visegrad Foreign Policies

This article is intended to be an overview of the position of Russia in the foreign policies of the four Visegrad countries, thus of Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. The background motivation behind preparing this analysis was on the one hand to provide a general overview of an important direction of Visegrad external relations and to compare the national interests related to Russia. On the other hand, the study also intends to explore the common interests and the differences in the individual Russia policies of the Visegrad countries, and thus to assess the coherence of Visegrad cooperation towards Russia in general. The article focuses on the current state of affairs, thus the historical context of Visegrad–Russia relations will be touched only briefly.

Hence, the main research questions to answer are the following. First, what are the common elements of the Visegrad’s national foreign policies towards Russia? In other words, by turning to the vocabulary of mathematics, what are the common denominators in the four Visegrad countries’ Russia policies?

The second research question is closely related to the first one: what are the points of disagreement on Russia—what are the divisors? Of course, one needs to handle separately those issues where opinions in the Visegrad simply differ from those cases where the countries are rivalling each other, e.g., where a zero sum game is going on.

The last question to answer is that when taking into account the common interests of the Visegrad countries in Russia, to what extent are the activities of the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) as an organisation in accordance with these objectives? The International Visegrad Fund is the only institutional

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1 The views presented here are of the author’s own, and they no way represent either the official position of the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs, or of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University. This publication was supported by the TÁMOP 4.2.1. B-11/2/KMR-2011-0002 grant of the European Union and the Hungarian Government.
emanation of the Visegrad cooperation, thus its activities deserve a closer look, and hence the question to be answered is does the IVF represent the shared interests of the Visegrad countries towards Russia? Is the IVF able to serve as an effective instrument in fostering the Visegrad interests related to Russia?

Regarding the sources, the analysis strongly builds on primary sources, particularly on official government documents, used in order to define the individual national foreign policy interests. Academicians analysing the subject of Russia are in a surprisingly good position regarding the availability of primary sources: all four Visegrad countries have their foreign policy strategies and national security strategies accessible in English, and several interviews and declarations by various officials are also available. The same is true for study of the relevant activities of the International Visegrad Fund.

Secondary sources for the subject are also available in remarkable quantities, both from Visegrad authors and from outside the region. Thus, plenty of analyses is connected, of course, to the obvious importance of Russia for the whole region. In all four Visegrad countries several studies and analytical papers have been prepared about various aspects of the relationship with Russia.

Poland has by far the largest and most diverse academic capabilities available for conducting Russia-related research. One may mention, among many others, the works of Marek Menkiszak, Adam Eberhardt, Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski and Agata Łoskot-Strachota. From the Czech Republic, the works of Petr Kratochvíl deserve particular attention in addition...
to the experts dealing specifically with energy security. From Slovakia, among many others, both Alexander Duleba\(^9\) and Vladimír Benč\(^10\) regularly prepare articles and studies related to Russia. The Hungarian expert community also has many well-known, competent analysts dealing with Russia. One may mention, for example the energy security expert András Deák,\(^11\) active diplomat Ernő Keskeny,\(^12\) and the economist Zsuzsa Ludvig.\(^13\)

Regarding the knowledge on the Visegrad region in general from the Russian side, one definitely needs to mention the recently published Russian language book by Lyubov Shishelina from the Institute of Europe of the Russia Academy of Sciences titled \textit{Vishegradskaya Evropa: otkuda i kuda?} [Visegrad Europe: From Where to Where?]. In her book, Shishelina provides a detailed overview of the contemporary histories, foreign and domestic policies of the four Visegrad countries. Though not much is written in the book particularly about contemporary Visegrad relations with Russia, the book is still highly important because it provides the reader with a comprehensive and coherent Russian view of the region.\(^14\)

A remarkable study on Visegrad–Russia relations written outside the region is the academic paper by Martin Dangerfield from the University of Wolverhampton presented at the 2011 European Union Studies Association conference in Boston.\(^15\) According to Dangerfield, among many other factors, the inherently different national interests of the individual Visegrad countries

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have largely prevented them from establishing an effective, joint Russia policy. The study is also extremely useful because it provides an overview of the earlier Russia-related policy efforts of the Visegrad group, which are not subjects of the current analysis.

Concerning its structure, the article is divided basically into three main parts. Following the introduction, first the national positions of the four Visegrad states towards Russia are studied, along two questions: a) political relations with Russia, including security and NATO-related issues, b) energy security. Second, the Russia-related activities of the International Visegrad Fund are analysed briefly, as an institutionalised component of Visegrad cooperation. The article ends with a final, concluding chapter.

**Political Relations with Russia**

Hereby the bilateral Russia-related political interests of the Visegrad countries are going to be analysed, with special attention paid to the EU and NATO aspects. Along with the research questions, emphasis is put on the issues of converging and/or diverging V4 interests about Russia.

**Converging General Interests**

Though all four Visegrad states had a troubled historical past with Russia, up to now most of the inherited problems have been solved: Soviet troops were withdrawn from Central Europe, the ex-Soviet state debt is settled, the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist, etc. From the political problems “inherited” from the pre-1989 period, currently only the restitution (e.g. the fate of the hundreds of thousands of artefacts forcibly taken away by Red Army units) remains unresolved, in addition to the still present negative memories of the pre-1989 Communist-ruled era.

In discussing the historical heritage, the Polish–Russian Group on Difficult Matters has done a pioneering job with organising regular expert seminars, historians’ conferences, publishing documents, etc.\(^{16}\) Interestingly enough, though all the Hungarian–Russian, Czech–Russian and Slovak–Russian relations are burdened by similarly troubled history, no similar institutions have yet been set up for discussing the problematic elements of bilateral relations.

Regarding contemporary high politics, all four Visegrad countries aim at fostering cooperation-oriented bilateral relationships with Russia, though with different focal points. The foreign and security policy strategy documents of all four Visegrad states emphasise the importance of enhancing political security cooperation and partnership with Russia. In terms of hard security, almost naturally, all four Visegrad states are strongly supportive of renewed disarmament talks between the United States and the Russian Federation, particularly regarding nuclear disarmament. However, when it comes to other aspects of foreign and security policy, individual Visegrad interests start to differ significantly.

The strategy titled “Polish Foreign Policy Priorities 2012–2016,” released in March 2012, declares that Poland is open to an EU-dialogue with Russia, and is ready to support Russian modernisation.\(^\text{17}\) It stresses the need for good, pragmatic relations and the intensification of political dialogue and economic contacts, besides progressing with a visa-free regime, not only for Russia but also for the Eastern Partnership countries. The strategy also speaks about the need for concluding the new comprehensive EU–Russia agreement that would include the mutual protection of investments as well.

In terms of NATO–Russia cooperation, the quoted Polish foreign policy document takes a rather confrontational approach on Russia, when it stresses the development of a missile defence system and also voices open support for the further eastern enlargement of the Alliance,\(^\text{18}\) though it is well known that both issues are highly sensitive in Russia.

The Foreign Policy Concept of the Czech Republic released in 2011\(^\text{19}\) places the relationship with Russia within the framework of Czech membership in EU and NATO.\(^\text{20}\) It welcomes cooperation with Russia in “all areas of common interests,” naming particularly energy security and the fight against terrorism, besides developing balanced economic relations; however, the partnership for modernisation is not mentioned at all. The Czech document prescribes continued dialogue with Russian civil society organisations in promoting human rights.


\(^{18}\) *Ibidem*, p. 15.


The strong focus on human rights is reflected in the “Report of the Foreign Policy of the Czech Republic 2010” as well.\textsuperscript{21} As well, the report also indicates strong Czech involvement in finding an EU-level solution to the protracted conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in order to prevent their “complete isolation and affiliation with Russia,” despite the fact that their independence is not recognised by the international community.\textsuperscript{22}

The Czech Foreign Policy Concept concentrates on cooperation in the fight against terrorism, defence reform, civil emergency planning and joint peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, though without mentioning any concrete missions.\textsuperscript{23} The Czech Report on Foreign Policy 2010 emphasises also theatre-level missile defence as an important aspect of NATO–Russia cooperation, and confirmed the Czech Republic’s interest in creating such a system in the framework of NATO.\textsuperscript{24}

According to the Slovak Foreign Policy Guidelines 2011, the main priority for Slovakia in its relations with Russia is to ensure “the security of supply of strategic raw materials from the Russian Federation and their transit to European customers.”\textsuperscript{25} National and European energy security is repeatedly stressed in the document. It also declares the need to increase the presence of Slovak products on the Russian market, besides intensifying business and investment cooperation. Bratislava is supportive of the EU–Russia Partnership for Modernisation as well as WTO membership for Russia.

As the document titled “Focus of the Foreign Policy of the Slovak Republic in 2012” prescribes,\textsuperscript{26} Slovakia supports the EU–Russia Partnership for Modernisation, particularly in the economic and socio-political dimension. According to the document, Slovakia also supports the establishment of a new

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibidem}, p. 26.
EU–Russia agreement, including the improvement of the business environment in Russia and supporting mobility as well.

Concerning NATO–Russia cooperation, the “Slovak Foreign Policy Guidelines 2011” mentions the missile defence system as an area of common NATO–Russia interests, in addition to cooperation in Afghanistan, defence against terrorism and combating extremism.27

Regarding Hungary, in the last 5–8 years both Moscow and Budapest have been interested in fostering bilateral energy, trade and business cooperation, and both have done their best to keep sensitive issues off the political agenda. Though the official foreign policy white book of the government of Viktor Orbán (in power since 2010) speaks about the “re-founding of Hungarian-Russian relations,”28 in fact not much has changed in this pragmatic attitude. Besides cooperating on issues of trade and energy security (both to be discussed later) the document emphasises the need for enhancing scientific and cultural cooperation and people-to-people contacts. The strategy stresses the necessity of security policy cooperation and of strengthening NATO–Russia and EU–Russia ties. Therefore, Hungary clearly supports the EU–Russia Partnership for Modernisation initiative, and is also in favour of visa facilitation and in the long term, a visa exemption both for Russia and for the Eastern Partnership countries.29 Hungary was also supportive of Russia’s WTO accession.

Hungary, just like the other three V4 countries, perceives NATO and the EU as the key guarantors of the country’s security and defence, as defined in the new National Security Strategy adopted in February 2012.30 Regarding relations with Russia, as with the other three V4 countries, Budapest is very much in favour of strengthening NATO–Russia relations, and welcomed stronger NATO–Russia cooperation in Afghanistm matters.

Though the missile defence (MD) issue was a key factor of tensions in the relations of Poland and the Czech Republic with Russia, Hungary deliberately stayed out of this conflict, though one has to add that the motivations were more

27 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, Slovak Foreign Policy Guidelines 2011, op. cit., p. 5.
29 Ibidem, p. 41.
domestic than Russia-related. Anyways, Budapest avoided even the opening of any official discussions on building an MD facility in Hungary, thus it did not burden its relations with Russia, unlike the Polish and Czech cases. However, when it comes to the establishment of an MD system in the framework of NATO, the Hungarian government is highly supportive of it, as it has stated in the new National Security Strategy adopted in February 2012.

...with the Frequent Lack of Coordination

Even though the general Russia-related foreign policy interests of the Visegrad countries are similar, they are indeed not the same. If one goes into the details, numerous differences can be found, and not only insignificant ones. The frequent lack of foreign policy coordination among the Visegrad countries has already been analysed by many experts. According to Ivo Samson, one of the central problems is the sheer lack of leadership in addition to the different historical backgrounds and threat perceptions, while Martin Dangerfield tracks the problem back mainly to different national interests.

Missile defence is just one example of differing Visegrad positions. Another interesting phenomenon is related to Visegrad interpretations of the EU–Russia Partnership for Modernisation. While the Polish document defines the modernisation, as “rule of law, political pluralism, freedom of speech and society treated subjectively,” the other three Visegrad foreign policy strategies give no such guidelines, and they just support the modernisation of Russia in general. Similar differences can be observed regarding the question of human rights in Russia as well. While the Czech foreign policy strategy puts a strong emphasis on the human rights situation in Russia, and the issue is implicitly mentioned in the Polish strategy as well, neither the Slovak nor the Hungarian foreign policy documents raise the issue practically at all.

34 M. Dangerfield, op. cit.
This was not the first case when the Polish position on NATO–Russia relations differed significantly from the other Visegrad states. One may remember, for example, the declaration of Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski in 2009, when he called for getting Russia included in NATO, mentioning that Moscow was needed for the resolution of European and global security problems.\textsuperscript{36} Not surprisingly, the initiative was quickly turned down by the Russians themselves. As far as it is known, Sikorski did not coordinate his move with the other Visegrad countries at all. One may speculate whether Sikorski’s objective was to make the Russians openly say “No” to the NATO membership prospect, particularly in light of the Medvedev proposal for a new European Security Treaty,\textsuperscript{37} but this cannot be proven.

Though one may be tempted to name Poland as the country that mostly tends to have a different position on Russia than the other three V4 states,\textsuperscript{38} in fact it is not always Poland that follows a separate track. Before the Bucharest summit, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic were equally supportive of Ukraine’s NATO accession. However, Hungary decided not to sign the letter of support,\textsuperscript{39} reportedly due to Budapest’s concerns of how it would affect relations with Russia.

The Hungarian position on Russia also differed from the other three Visegrad states in the case of the war in Georgia in 2008. During and after the war in Georgia, the Hungarian government was much more moderate than either Poland or the Czech Republic in condemning the Russian aggression. Though Budapest was supportive of Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, and obviously did not recognise the “independence” of the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, Hungary was also opposed to any sanctions against Russia.


\textsuperscript{37} In November 2009 Russian President Dmitry Medvedev proposed a new European Security Treaty, in which both Russia and the NATO would have been members. As decision-making would have been consensus-based, such a structure would have provided Russia with a de facto veto right over all security-related issues of Europe. The proposal is available at www.kremlin.ru.


\textsuperscript{39} M. Dangerfield, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 11.
According to the WikiLeaks cables, the U.S. government was critical of the slow Hungarian reactions.  

Perhaps the most recent indicator of the lack of a unified Visegrad position on Russia was the reaction to the Russian presidential elections in March 2012. The Visegrad states could not adopt a common position at all on either the elections or the protests. On the contrary, the official website of the Visegrad Group contains several common declarations and statements on the Eastern Partnership, on Ukraine, on Belarus and also on the Western Balkans. From this, one may easily come to the conclusion that the Visegrad group is much more coherent on the Eastern Partnership region than on Russia.

**Energy Security**

Concerning Visegrad energy security, one needs to be aware of the fundamentally different situations of the four countries. All four have highly different energy mixes, however, as far as the role of Russia, all of them are highly dependent on Russian natural gas supplies, and are slightly less dependent on Russian oil.

The gas dependence of the Visegrad countries varies along many parameters. Concerning the share of natural gas in the overall energy mix, Hungary is the most dependent with 37%, while Poland represents the other extreme with 12%. If one examines the share of imported gas in overall gas consumption, the picture is slightly different: though Poland is the least import-dependent at 63%, the other three countries are extremely dependent—Hungary is at 80%, the Czech Republic is at 91%, and Slovakia gets almost 100% of the gas it consumes from external sources. This external source is predominantly Russia, at least in the Polish, Czech and Slovak cases. Hungary is slightly less dependent on Russia—approximately 70% is Russian-origin natural gas.

Besides the dependence on Russia as a source country, the Visegrad region is also dependent on two transit countries of Russian gas, namely Belarus and

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40 A comprehensive analysis on the Hungarian governmental discourse and the WikiLeaks is available at: “Túl sokáig hallgatott Gyurcsány a grúz háború idején” [Gyurcsány remained silent too long during the Georgian war], *Kitekintő*, 16 September 2011, www.kitekinto.hu.

41 For more information, see: The Visegrad Group, *Official Statements and Communiques, op. cit.*, www.visegradgroup.eu.

Ukraine. The negative effects of this dependence were clearly demonstrated during the 2007 Russia–Belarus gas dispute, and most importantly, during the 2009 Russia–Ukraine gas crisis, which hit the whole Visegrad region particularly hard. In addition to these, Hungary has a third level of gas dependency as well, namely that the country lacks any significant transit position. Hence, unlike the other three Visegrad states, Budapest possesses no bargaining chip at all in its relations with Russia. In the natural gas sector, the situation could well be described as a “triple dependency:” Budapest has only one import source (Russia), one transit line (Ukraine) and owns no transit position.

**Diversification in the Focal Point**

Though diversification of gas supplies was already on the agenda by 2009, the Russian–Ukrainian gas crisis clearly constituted a turning point. Since then, all four Visegrad countries have been actively seeking both gas supply and gas transit alternatives. The most important Visegrad-wide project for diversification is the North–South gas interconnectors that will join the gas systems of the four Visegrad countries. The main objective of the interconnectors is to provide access to alternative gas sources, namely western sources, LNG terminals and shale gas reserves. Besides, they also provide means to aid each other in times of crisis, in addition to improving the price bargaining capabilities of the Visegrad countries.

As pointed out by Andrej Nosko, it was actually quite surprising that the shock of 2009 was necessary for starting the construction of the interconnectors. The four Visegrad countries together constitute the second-largest consumer of Russian natural gas after Germany, thus with an interconnected gas system they could have achieved far better gas prices than they pay now far earlier.

Nosko drives attention also to the high public support for building the interconnectors in all the Visegrad countries. However, as he argues, in addition to the security concerns, the EU involvement in the financing was also crucial, e.g., the fact that the EU included energy in its recovery programme package, and started to provide financial support for the interconnectors, in addition to the Nabucco pipeline, the LNG terminal to be built in Poland, the development of

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gas storage facilities and also to enable reverse gas flows in the wider Central European region. The four Visegrad countries were reportedly successful in lobbying for this support in the European Commission.\footnote{Ibidem, pp. 87–89.}

**Hungary Opt for the South Stream?**

Recently a significant turn has been made that affects the gas supply diversification objectives of the Visegrad countries. As the article intends to focus on the contemporary developments, it is worth taking a closer look at the decision of Hungary in the South Stream vs. Nabucco debate.\footnote{The Nabucco pipeline is a project of a new gas pipeline that would transport Caspian gas to Europe, thus providing a significant alternative to Russian gas sources. The pipeline, if completed, would cross Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and would connect to the main European gas distribution networks at Baumgarten, in Austria. The project has strong EU and U.S. backing however, both the exact sources of gas and the financial construction are yet unclear.}

Nabucco had a number of very visible problems, pointed out by many analysts many times. However, it was the Hungarian MOL Oil and Gas Company that first openly quit the project. In April 2012, Hungary Prime Minister Viktor Orbán declared that MOL would quit the Nabucco project, saying that “Nabucco is in trouble.”\footnote{Z. Simon, “Hungarian Premier Orban Says Mol Leaving Nabucco Gas Project,” Bloomberg, 23 April 2012, www.bloomberg.com.} Shortly thereafter, following a rapid visit by Gazprom CEO Alexei Medvedev to Budapest in October 2012, on 2 November 2012, a contract was signed on building the Hungarian section of the South Stream\footnote{The South Stream is a Russian-initiated pipeline project that would bypass Ukraine and deliver Russian gas to the European Union through a pipeline under the Black Sea from Russia to Bulgaria. The further line of the South Stream is Romania, Hungary and Austria.} pipeline. Most probably the agreement was part of a larger package deal. It reportedly has connections with the negotiations on the future new gas contract.\footnote{“A Gazprom minket választott” [Gazprom Has Chosen Us], Népszabadság, 2 November 2012, www.nol.hu.} In addition, the Paks nuclear power plant also needs to be modernised soon, and Russian companies are among the competitors for the contract.

In order to understand the move by Budapest, one needs to take a closer look at the security of Hungary’s gas supply. Decreasing the “triple dependency” mentioned above has been a key priority of Hungarian energy security policy in the last decade. Regarding the gas sector, before 2010 Budapest supported both
the South Stream and Nabucco projects, as it was unclear which one of them was going to be completed. This policy was often called double-pipeline politics.\textsuperscript{50} The Orbán-government has continued the multi-track, diversification-oriented policies of its predecessors. The government programme openly aimed at achieving “energy independence.”\textsuperscript{51} In line with this objective, already in September 2010 Orbán signed the Baku Declaration and joined the AGRI (Azerbaijan–Georgia–Romania Interconnector) project.\textsuperscript{52}

On 24 May 2011, Hungary signed an agreement with Surgutneftegaz to buy back its 22.1% shares of MOL Hungarian Oil and Gas Company for €1.88 billion. The fact that Hungary blocked a Russian strategic acquisition effort by using administrative and legal tools was perceived rather negatively in Moscow.\textsuperscript{53}

The Hungarian government’s \textit{National Energy Security Strategy 2030}, adopted in early 2012, followed a much more rational line regarding the diversification chances.\textsuperscript{54} The strategy prescribes that Russian gas is going to play a key role even in the medium term, thus Hungary needs to conduct such a foreign policy towards Russia and Ukraine that ensures uninterrupted supplies and transit. At the same time, other diversification opportunities also need to be studied. The document concretely names the Visegrad-supported Central European interconnectors as a possible alternative, in addition to the Nabucco pipeline, regional LNG import possibilities and shale gas options.\textsuperscript{55} Building the interconnectors has been going on rather successfully: in 2010–2012, both the Romanian–Hungarian and the Croatian–Hungarian gas connections were established, and the construction of the Slovak–Hungarian pipeline is also expected to be completed in 2013.

The withdrawal of MOL from Nabucco does not mean that Hungary itself has abandoned either the whole project, or Visegrad energy solidarity. Preparations for the pipeline are still ongoing—in August 2012, the Hungarian section of Nabucco got the last environmental license necessary for starting

\textsuperscript{50}“Energy Security of the Visegrad region,” \textit{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{52}\textit{Aláírták a bakui nyilatkozatot} [Baku Declaration was signed], official website of the Hungarian Prime Minister, 10 September 2010, www.miniszterelnok.hu.
\textsuperscript{53}Personal interview with Russian diplomat, Budapest, October 2012.
\textsuperscript{55}\textit{Ibidem}, p. 65.
actual construction. Though MOL’s exit indeed delays the project, it obviously does not mean the end of Nabucco.

All in all, one may describe the situation as that the earlier double-pipeline politics of Budapest have been replaced by a multi-pipeline approach. Diversification remains the main objective of Hungarian energy security, thus besides remaining engaged both in the South Stream and Nabucco projects, Budapest keeps on building the Central European interconnectors as well.

The International Visegrad Fund and Russia

Instead of yet another presentation of the policies of the four Visegrad countries, the author will now look at the only institutional emanation of the V4, the Bratislava-based International Visegrad Fund (IVF). Established in 2000, IVF functions as the institutional arm of the Visegrad Group. Hence, in order to properly analyse the Russia policies of the Visegrad region, it is important to take a closer look also at the Russia-related projects of the IVF.

According to its official website, the “the purpose of the Fund is to facilitate and promote the development of closer cooperation among V4 countries (and of V4 countries with other countries, especially but not exclusively non-EU member states in Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus) …” through the support of various common cultural, educational, research and cross-border projects in addition to individual mobility programmes. It is interesting to note that while the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus share a widely agreed meaning. They always mean the same countries: the “Western Balkans” is used for the countries of the former Yugoslavia except Croatia and Slovenia, but together with Albania, while the “South Caucasus” refers to Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The term “Eastern Europe” is slightly more of a blur. From the text itself it is not clear whether Russia is included in the priority regions and to what extent.

By analysing the amount of grants and support programmes related to Russia one may presumably be able to estimate the overall importance of Russia to the IVF. It is reasonable though, to handle the scholarships and grants separately, simply due to their fundamentally different nature. While the scholarships support individual mobility and research projects, grants are designed for larger, more comprehensive actions.

The Scholarship Programmes and Russia

Of the Visegrad Scholarships’ five existing schemes (Incoming; Outgoing; Intra-Visegrad; Visegrad Scholarship at the Open Society Archives, or OSA; and the Visegrad Taiwan Scholarship), Russian applicants are eligible only for two, namely for the Incoming and OSA types.

Besides, it is worth noting that although since 2005 there has been a separate scholarship programme for Ukrainian students, and since 2009 another programme for Belarusians, so far there is nothing similar for Russia or Russian students. Another particularity is that the Outgoing Scholarship does not permit Visegrad scholars and students to go to Russia.

All in all, in the period 2003–2012, only a negligible number of Russian applicants were successful in getting a Visegrad scholarship, as demonstrated in the table below:

Table

Successful Russian applicants for the Visegrad Scholarship, 2003–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year [deadline of submission]</th>
<th>Overall number of approved Visegrad scholarships</th>
<th>Number of grantees from Russia</th>
<th>Rate of Russian scholarship-holders [%]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012*</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altogether</td>
<td>1193</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Together with the new scholarship to the Open Society Archives (OSA) established in 2011.

Source: Author’s compilation based on the official IVF data: International Visegrad Fund, Approved Scholarships, 12 October 2012, www.visegradfund.org. As visible in the table, the rate of successful Russian applicants never exceeded 9% of all scholarships granted in a given year, but altogether they represent less than 5% of all applicants. In 10 year’s time only 57 scholarships were granted to Russian applicants. By contrast, since 2005 more than 250 Ukrainian students and scholars received the special scholarship for Ukrainian students and researchers, and so far, more than 80 Belarusian applicants have been successful in receiving a Belarusian scholarship in the last four years.
Hence, one may conclude that the Visegrad scholarship programmes do only very little to foster closer cooperation and people-to-people contacts with Russia. This is in sharp contrast with the support provided to the Eastern Partnership countries in particular.

**The Grant Programmes and Russia**

The IVF operates a number of different grant schemes, ranging from the short-term Small Grants with a maximum of €6,000 to multi-annual, large Strategic and University Studies Grants worth of several tens of thousands of euros. Though studying each and every grant proposal supported since 2000 would clearly exceed the limits of this study, the Annual Report 2011 of the International Visegrad Fund provides useful summarised information on the grants.

According to the report, between 2000 and 2011 the overall amount paid in support of various grants schemes increased from the original approximate amount of €406,000 to €5 million, which means more than a 12-fold increase. All in all, in the studied period €38,604,000 were spent on grant projects.

However, before one may analyse the Russian share of these projects in the same manner as the scholarships, an important methodological note needs to be taken into consideration. In the case of the scholarships it was easy to calculate the Russian share because one only needed to take the number of Russian citizens who got the scholarships. However, the situation is much more complicated with the grants, as data available are only on the funding sorted by recipient countries and not by the contents of the various grant projects. In other words, the number and amount of grants received by Russia are far not equal to the ones related to Russia, or to the ones that involve Russian participants as well. Anyways, as a thorough, comparative analysis of all successful grant projects is currently not among the research objectives, hereby only the first type of data is used, e.g., the grants received by Russia.

As a starting point, it is important to note that Russians are actually eligible for various Visegrad grants to a large extent, at least in theory. According to the current grant regulations, any organisations or natural persons from the world can apply for Visegrad Small, Medium, Strategic and Visegrad University Studies Grants. The only general requirement is that the applicants need to be

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civil actors, thus cannot be financed directly from the state budget. This could easily be met by a Russian applicants as well.\(^{58}\)

However, both for Small and Standard Grants it is necessary to have at least three Visegrad countries involved, while for a Strategic Grant, partners from all V4 countries are needed. This does not make it easy for Russian applicants to come up with eligible proposals. Moreover, the decision on the Strategic Grants is reportedly politicised to a large extent,\(^{59}\) and this environment is not supportive to Russian applicants, especially taken into account the large number of Visegrad applicants for the same grant scheme. However, as pointed out by Dangerfield, the IVF has supported a small number of Strategic Grant projects that were actually related to Russia.\(^{60}\)

According to the 2011 Annual Report, since 2003 not even a single Russian grant application project has received support from the International Visegrad Fund. It is unclear, however, whether this is a result of simply a lack of Russian grant applications or there is another motivation in the background. Russian applications were successful only for the scholarship calls, as was demonstrated earlier.

The contrast is again sharp if one compares the Russian results, and particularly the amounts with the ones of the Eastern Partnership countries. All in all, the six EaP countries received €3,632,325 in the 2004–2011 period in the form of grants and scholarships together, constituting 9.2% of total spending.\(^{61}\) On the contrary, Russia received only €266,100, composed only of scholarships. This is equal only to 0.67% of all IVF spending.\(^{62}\) As another comparison, even Western Balkan countries were granted €659,390, or 1.67% of the total. Serbia alone received almost twice as much funding—€475,890, or a 1.21% share—than did Russia.

Hence, if one intends to define the priorities of the IVF scholarships and grant projects, one may come to the conclusion that Russia is definitely not among them. The overall structure of the IVF financing mechanism clearly supports this argument: while there are separate budgetary resources dedicated particularly to the prioritised Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan countries,

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\(^{59}\) Personal interview with competent Hungarian official, Budapest, 5 October 2012.

\(^{60}\) M. Dangerfield, *op. cit.*, p. 9.


there is no similar structure regarding Russia. Besides, the amounts of support
won by Russian applicants are negligible compared to those from EaP countries,
and much small even than those from the Western Balkans. All in all, by judging
from the financial support mechanisms, one can conclude that Russia is clearly
not a prioritised country, unlike the states of the Eastern Partnership and the
Western Balkans region.

Conclusions

The main aim of the article was to provide an overview of the position of
Russia in the foreign policies of the four Visegrad countries, focusing almost
exclusively on the current situation. The background motivation was, in addition
to the study of the important external relationship of Visegrad cooperation, to
explore the common interests and the differences in the individual Russia-
policies of the Visegrad countries.

All in all, the answers to the research questions are the following. Concerning the first one, the most important common elements of the four
Visegrad foreign policies towards Russia are the shared hard security interests.
All V4 countries perceive the EU and NATO as the primary guarantors of their
security. They are fully in favour of a strong and coherent NATO policy towards
Russia, and none wants to isolate Moscow in any way. They also support closer
NATO–Russia cooperation in matters related to Afghanistan. As for missile
defence, all four Visegrad countries are already in favour of it, particularly
because it is going to be erected under the NATO framework, regardless of any
Russian opposition.

Shared interests are also present in the field of energy security. Diversification of the natural gas supply routes of the Central European region
in order to decrease the dependence on Russian gas sources—and on the often
problematic Ukrainian and Belarusian transit routes as well—is a highly
important priority for all four Visegrad governments. The joint project of the so
called North–South interconnectors clearly demonstrates this commitment.
Though the Hungarian MOL’s exit from Nabucco indeed delayed the project, the
construction of the gas interconnectors in the wider Visegrad region clearly seem
to be of lasting interest.

The second research task was to explore those issues, where Visegrad
positions on Russia differ, or are even rivalling each other. Starting again from
the hard security issues, the missile defence system has constituted an important
dividing line inside the Visegrad Group. While Warsaw has been strongly in
favour of the system, perceiving its presence in Poland as an additional security
guarantee, the Czech Republic has been deeply divided about it. Hungary, the
third V4 country that was originally planned to be involved in the project, has
decided to stay out of it completely. However, as stated earlier, these differences
seem to be diminishing as the missile defence system is gradually developing
towards a NATO-wide project, of which all four Visegrad countries are in
favour. Another dividing issue has been the possible NATO-accession of Ukraine
and Georgia, which was supported by three of the four Visegrad countries and
not Hungary.

When it comes to the softer aspects of security and foreign policy, the V4
interests have started to increasingly differ. Though all four countries are in
favour of the EU–Russia Partnership for Modernisation project, and they all
support gradual visa liberalisation for Russia, the details of the positions differ to
a significant extent. In the Polish interpretation of the Partnership, the rule of
law and democratisation of the political system is included as well, while
Hungary makes no such distinctions. Besides, while the Czech Republic is
highly critical of Russia due to concerns about human rights and democratic
freedoms, Hungary and Slovakia pay much less attention to these issues and
strive for pragmatic, primarily business-oriented cooperation.

As well, though the need for pragmatic cooperation with Russia is often
emphasised in all V4 capitals, the example of the Polish–Russian dialogue has
found no followers in the other three Visegrad countries. In scientific and educational
cooperation, in line with their general commitment to the Partnership for
Modernisation, all of the V4 countries are in favour of getting Russia more
involved, however, little has yet been done on this front.

Besides the differing foreign and security policy positions, one needs to note
that all four Visegrad foreign policy strategies prescribe the improvement of
trade, business and investment cooperation with Russia, together with increasing
the national presences on the Russian market. However, in terms of trade and
investments in Russia, Visegrad interests are clearly rivalling each other. All
four countries compete for the same Russian consumers, and seek opportunities
on the same Russian market. In other words, in their investment and trade
policies the Visegrad countries currently pursue a zero-sum game. Their only
common interest in this field is the improvement of the business climate in
Russia. However, if this happens, it will just make the intra-Visegrad rivalry for
the Russian market access more intense.
Regarding the third research question, one may conclude that the Russia-related activities of the International Visegrad Fund correspond with the Russia-related interests of the individual V4 states only to a limited extent. First, the primary policy field of activity of the IVF, e.g., fostering scientific, educational and cultural cooperation, and people-to-people contacts does not match with the most important policy areas of shared V4 interests. The IVF does not deal directly with hard security or with issues on gas supply diversification, though from time to time it supports research on these topics. In other words, it is a fundamental mistake to expect the IVF to become a key player in the field of V4–Russia relations, simply because foreign and security policy is not in its portfolio.

Second, Russia is not among the priority regions of the IVF at all, contrary to the Eastern Partnership countries or the Western Balkans. Hence, there are no institutionalised programmes aimed at fostering cooperation particularly with Russia. Even though Russian students are eligible for the Visegrad scholarships only very few Russian applications are successful. Moreover, V4 scholars cannot travel to Russia with these funds at all. Besides, though Russian non-governmental organisations and universities would theoretically be eligible for getting IVF grants, none of them have received any so far.

The very limited IVF support for scientific, educational and cultural cooperation with Russia is an interesting phenomenon, particularly in light of the often-voiced will of the individual Visegrad countries to intensify such ties with Moscow. On the one hand, mechanisms and practices of the IVF could very well be used to foster cooperation with Russia similar to the Eastern Partnership countries. On the other hand, the availability of financial resources obviously limits these ambitions. The increasingly negative attitude of the Russian authorities towards Western NGOs constitutes another factor of concern.

However, the EU–Russia Partnership for Modernisation could offer the necessary high politics framework for the Visegrad countries to use the IVF to foster cooperation with Russia. Emphasis could first be put on the politically less-sensitive sphere of education and research: the precedent exists already (e.g., a few Russian students have received Visegrad scholarships), and via educational cooperation the Visegrad countries could contribute to the modernisation of Russia without either upsetting the Kremlin or endangering their own national interests. Hence, as usual, the political will remains the primary question—both on the Visegrad and the Russian sides.
Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans: A Group Perspective

The accession of the Visegrad countries to the European Union enabled them to start shaping EU policies and in fact use the EU as a tool of their own foreign policies towards third countries or regions. This new opportunity is directly mentioned in the so called Kroměříž Declaration, which was adopted shortly after their EU accession. The Declaration clearly says that V4 countries support the continuation of the EU enlargement process and are ready to assist countries that aspire for membership by offering their own experiences, including regional cooperation.\(^1\) This commitment concerned both Eastern and Southeastern Europe, though, it was obvious that the Western Balkan countries had a more realistic integration perspective compared to their Eastern neighbours. The Declaration therefore confirmed that the Visegrad Group (V4) will mainly be oriented towards two territorial foreign policy priorities—the Eastern neighbourhood and the Western Balkans.

Support for the integration of the Western Balkan countries to the EU ranks high among the foreign policy priorities of all of the V4 countries, despite the fact that there are certain differences in their interests in the region, and the Western Balkans represent one of the key priorities of EU enlargement policy.\(^2\) Taking this into account, one can see that the integration of the Western Balkan countries into the EU national foreign policy priorities of the V4 countries is fully compatible with that of the EU. This is another reason why the Western Balkans have continuously been mentioned as one of the priority areas of various Visegrad Group presidencies.


The main goal of this article is to assess the current and future possibilities of cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans. The article does not analyse the involvement of particular V4 countries in the Western Balkans region or the relations among the Western Balkan and V4 countries, but focuses solely on the role played by the Visegrad Group as such. The focus is on three general levels of cooperation. First, the article analyses the achievements and opportunities of political cooperation. Second, the possibilities for sharing institutional or procedural know-how are discussed. The third part develops concrete suggestions for sectoral cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans. At the end, the article also highlights some problem areas, especially on the EU level, that might prevent cooperation from developing.

**Strengthened Position of the V4 in the EU**

Before analysing the role the Visegrad Group has played in the Balkans, one has to assess the changing position of the V4 in the EU. By joining the EU, the V4 countries achieved a most crucial policy priority. Since integration was also the top priority of the Visegrad Group, membership in the EU was not just an achievement of individual countries but also for the Visegrad Group as a whole. Though the V4 trademark increased significantly in both Brussels and Washington after its members’ accession to both the EU and NATO, the Visegrad Group as such was left without a priority whose importance would be comparable to the integration to Euro-Atlantic structures. Although the Kroměříž Declaration was also accompanied by more concrete guidelines, it took the V4 some time to anchor the new priorities and mechanisms for cooperation in policymaking. This very specific “enlargement fatigue” was, however, fully overcome, and the V4’s role in the EU—thanks to wisely used coordination and consultation mechanisms—has been steadily increasing. Joining the Schengen system may be perceived as one of the most important achievements of the V4 in the

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4 The guidelines included areas of cooperation within the V4 area and within the EU, cooperation with other partners, cooperation within NATO and other international organisations, as well as mechanisms of cooperation. See: “Guidelines of Future Areas of Visegrad Cooperation,” www.visegradgroup.eu.

5 The coordination of positions can be demonstrated through the regular meetings of representatives of V4 countries, including prime ministers and foreign ministers, before important meetings held on the EU level.
post-accession period and one that fully legitimised the will of its member governments to continue to develop cooperation under the V4 umbrella. The list of cooperation areas from 2004 was enriched by new topics, especially energy security, which played an important role. The economic crisis from 2009 and the subsequent depth of the crisis brought further challenges to the Visegrad Group. Developments post-EU accession proved again that the V4 countries may not always speak in one voice but are capable of cooperating closely on issues of strategic importance, including energy security or the development of relations with the Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan countries.

Although the Kroměříž Declaration and accompanying guidelines mention the integration of the Western Balkan countries to the EU as one of the priorities of the Visegrád Group, in practical terms the interest of the V4 in the Western Balkans region had to overcome certain developments as well. It can be argued that in the first years after the EU accession the emphasis was put primarily on the development of cooperation with countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU. There were various reasons for this, including promising changes in the political leadership in Ukraine in 2004 and the increasing interest of key EU countries in the development of relations with the EU’s eastern neighbours in the framework of European neighbourhood policy. On the other hand, the Western Balkan countries became to a certain extent victims of EU enlargement fatigue, which was especially obvious after Bulgaria and Romania joined the Union in 2007. Another reason for decreased interest in the Western Balkans included the complicated political developments in most of the countries of the region and their complicated neighbourhood relations. The map of the region had also changed—Montenegro became an independent state after the split of the Serbia–Montenegro Union in 2006, and in 2008 Kosovo unilaterally declared independence. The integration prospects of Macedonia suffered from its frozen conflict with Greece, while Albania’s and Bosnia and Herzegovina’s further rapprochement with the EU was complicated mostly by unstable domestic political situations. The only exception was Croatia, however, despite being on...
the fastest integration track it also faced significant problems and slow-downs.\textsuperscript{8} Last but not least, there existed an unofficial division of labour between the two leading regional Central European initiatives until 2009/2010, which was during the Hungarian V4 presidency. While the V4 oriented itself primarily on the eastern neighbours, the Austria-led Regional Partnership consisting of the V4 countries plus Austria and Slovenia focused more on the Western Balkans. There certainly was some logic behind that, but later on, the Regional Partnership smoothly transformed itself into the Visegrad Plus formula (the V4 along with Austria and Slovenia).

The Hungarian presidency of the V4 in 2009–2010 established the informal tradition to have two regular summits of Visegrad foreign ministers—one dedicated to the Western Balkans and the other focused on the Eastern Neighbourhood countries. The 2012/2013 Polish presidency of the V4 will conclude the first round of the summits, while the subsequent Hungarian presidency will start the second round. Besides political support on the regional and EU levels, the increasing interest of the V4 in the Western Balkans is also demonstrated by the opening of programmes by the only institution in the V4—the International Visegrad Fund—to applicants and scholars from Western Balkan countries.\textsuperscript{9}

\textbf{Visegrad in the Western Balkans and Vice-versa}

Cooperation of the Visegrad Group with the Western Balkans can be analysed on three basic levels. The first is political and is perhaps the most developed. The second level of cooperation is based on the sharing of institutional and procedural know-how. The third level concerns cooperation in sectoral issues.

\textbf{Political cooperation.} As previously mentioned, the Visegrad countries and the Visegrad Group as a whole have supported the integration of the Western Balkan countries into the European Union. Such support is embodied in a number of Visegrad Group documents, including the Kroměříž and Bratislava declarations, presidency programmes or ministerial statements.\textsuperscript{10} It is also worth

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\textsuperscript{9} For more details, see the official webpage of the International Visegrad Fund, www.visegradfund.org.

\textsuperscript{10} “Declaration of Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic on cooperation of the Visegrad Group countries after their accession to the European Union,” 12 May 2004, www.visegradgroup.eu; “The Bratislava Declaration of the Prime Ministers of the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the
mentioning that the summits of the V4 foreign ministers and their counterparts from the Western Balkan countries are attended by representatives of the European Commission as well.\textsuperscript{11} The V4 countries create the core of a group of countries that can be informally called “Friends of Enlargement Policy,” which is—because of the ongoing debt and economic crisis—not among the top priorities of the EU. Nevertheless, thanks to the support of the Visegrad Group there were some significant achievements made in the framework of the enlargement process: in 2010, Montenegro achieved candidate status, and in June 2012 officially started negotiations with the EU;\textsuperscript{12} in 2012, Serbia was granted candidate status, and though it is still waiting for the beginning of negotiations, that also can be considered a remarkable success;\textsuperscript{13} and last but not least, the planned accession of Croatia to the EU in July 2013 would not have been possible without the political support of the Visegrad countries, both at the regional as well as bilateral levels.\textsuperscript{14}

Although the regular meetings of the representatives of the V4 and Western Balkans are held primarily among foreign ministers, it is also worth highlighting the importance of meetings of political directors and heads of analytical departments. Such meetings allow the V4 and Western Balkans representatives to discuss political issues from a more detailed perspective. One of the most

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{11} The meeting of the V4 and Western Balkans foreign ministers was also attended by the minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia, the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy and the European External Action Service Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia. See: “Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia on the Western Balkans,” Prague, 4 November 2011, www.visegradgroup.eu.


\textsuperscript{13} Serbia is the biggest country in the Western Balkans, and its progress in the process of EU integration therefore has implications on the whole region. Taking into account that enlargement policy—due to the ongoing debt and eurozone crisis—is not among the top priorities of the EU, granting candidate status to Serbia can be considered an achievement.

\textsuperscript{14} The support for Croatia’s accession to the EU is directly mentioned in a number of statements available on the official website of the Visegrad Group, www.visegradgroup.eu. See also: “Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group and Slovenia on the Western Balkans,” Prague, 4 November 2011, www.visegradgroup.eu.
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recent examples of cooperation on this level includes the visit of V4 political

Sharing of institutional and procedural know-how. The Visegrad Group
is characterised by a weak institutionalisation, which means that its structures
are basically limited to just the International Visegrad Fund. However, during
the more than 20 years of its existence, procedures for cooperation have
developed very well in the V4 and encompass both political, as well as sectoral
cooperation.

Although a V4-like regional initiative does not exist in the Western Balkans,
the Visegrad cooperation has already become an inspiration for developing
serious regional projects in the region. The establishment of a free trade area in
the Western Balkans—the Central European Free Trade Agreement of 2006
(CEFTA 2006)—proves that a model that was originally in the minds of
representatives of the V4 countries can also be implemented in the Western
Balkans region. It can be argued that CEFTA enabled the V4 members (and
other countries of “wider” Central Europe—Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia) to
prepare themselves for entering the EU single market, while the parties to
CEFTA 2006 initiative had exactly the same goal.\footnote{The contracting parties of CEFTA 2006 are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and UNMIK (on behalf of Kosovo). The main goal of CEFTA has been to expand trade in goods and services, eliminate barriers to trade among the involved countries, as well as to foster investment. It also aims to harmonise provisions on modern trade policy issues, such as competition rules and state aid. The agreement provides a framework for the countries involved to prepare for EU accession, and thus CEFTA 2006 continues the tradition of the original CEFTA, whose founding members are already EU members. For more details see: www.cefta2006.com.} CEFTA itself can therefore be considered the most efficient example to date of the export of know-how from the Visegrad Group to the Western Balkans.

Another example of the transfer of institutional know-how to the Western
Balkans concerns the ongoing discussion regarding the establishment of the
“Western Balkan Fund.”\footnote{This is just a working title used in the feasibility study developed by the International Centre for Democratic Transition (ICDT). The official name of a new fund might be different.} The idea of establishing a fund in the Western
Balkans that would have a similar focus as the International Visegrad Fund
(IVF) was initially developed by the International Centre for Democratic Transition (ICDT) in Budapest. An international group of experts on civil

Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans: A Group Perspective
society and regional cooperation developed it in the first half of 2011.\textsuperscript{18} Similar to the IVF, the “Western Balkan Fund” would be created by the governments of interested Western Balkan countries whose contributions would mainly support people-to-people contacts, cooperation amongst civil society organisations as well as cross-border cooperation. The fund is expected to grow and would be expected to provide funding for an increasing number of grants every year.\textsuperscript{19} The fund’s feasibility study also calls on the V4 governments and other state and non-state actors to match the Western Balkan countries’ contributions. Though neither the date of the establishment of the “Western Balkan Fund” nor the list of participating countries has been announced, or its budget for that matter, the official talks between representatives of the Visegrad Group and the International Visegrad Fund that started during the Czech presidency of the Visegrad Group and continue under the Polish presidency show that all sides are taking the idea seriously.\textsuperscript{20}

**Sectoral cooperation.** Although the V4 Plus Western Balkans format has become used regularly on the political level, in terms of sectoral cooperation such collaboration is still quite rare. The analysis of the presidency programmes and annual reports (2003/2004–2011/2012)\textsuperscript{21} provide us with quite a short list of examples of cooperation held in the V4 Plus Western Balkans format.

The defence sector is one in which cooperation has been initiated. A meeting of V4 ministers of defence and their counterparts from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia took place during the Hungarian V4 presidency in October 2009. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss in detail the NATO and EU integration of the Western Balkan countries (though Ukraine was also present), as well as possible V4 contributions, which were discussed and examined in detail.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} “Non-paper on the Feasibility study on the possible creation of a ‘Western Balkan Fund’ for regional cooperation based on the International Visegrad Fund model,” www.icdt.hu.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibidem.


\textsuperscript{21} All presidency programmes and annual reports are available on the official website of the Visegrad Group, www.visegradgroup.eu.

\textsuperscript{22} National positions on the new NATO Strategic Concept were also exchanged during the meeting. It was also decided that a Strategic Concept working group would be set up based on the V4 delegations to NATO. See “2009/2010 Hungarian Presidency—Annual Report,” www.visegradgroup.eu.
V4–Western Balkan cooperation has perhaps been most visible in the energy sector. Challenges shared by the V4 and Western Balkan countries in terms of energy security and interconnectors resulted in a few meetings held at various levels. Though in 2006 an extended V4 meeting of executives responsible for the energy sector included only a representative of Croatia (Austria, Romania and Slovenia were also represented), the V4 Plus Energy Summit held in Budapest in January 2010 counted on the participation of representatives of several Western Balkan countries. In addition to the V4 countries, Austria, Bulgaria and Romania, co-signatories of the Summit Declaration also included Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. The summit initiated the creation of several working groups, including the V4 working group on a North–South interconnector. The extended meeting of this working group, plus Croatia, was held in September 2010 during the Slovak V4 presidency. The more intensive inclusion of Croatia into the meetings on energy security results from its importance to the North–South interconnector. The upcoming Czech V4 presidency (2011/2012) prepared a memorandum of understanding on North–South interconnectors in Central and Eastern Europe, which was signed by the V4 countries, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, Romania, Slovenia and the European Commission.

Other cooperation initiatives in the V4 Plus Western Balkans format include the justice and home affairs sectors. A seminar on experiences with the fight against corruption for experts from the V4 and Western Balkans justice ministries was organised under the Hungarian V4 presidency in 2006. However, the Slovak presidency (2010/2011) organised a meeting of the V4 Plus Croatia justice ministers (as well as Slovenia and Germany) at which

26 The memorandum focuses primarily on the integration of electricity markets in the region as well as on the need to ensure the security of energy supplies. Regarding the gas market, the memorandum stresses the need to develop and integrate it within the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, further diversify routes, sources and counterparts in order to enhance the security of gas supply. As important is to enhance the regional security of oil supplies and intensify the coordination of priorities and energy infrastructure projects on a regional level. See: “Memorandum of Understanding on North-South Interconnections in Central-Eastern Europe,” http://ec.europa.eu.
a memorandum of cooperation regarding judicial training was signed.\(^{28}\) One year later, a meeting of V4 justice ministers with Croatia and Slovenia was held during the Czech presidency.\(^{29}\) The Czech presidency also managed to organise the 2\(^{nd}\) Ministerial Conference of the Prague Process,\(^{30}\) which focused preliminary on issues related to asylum and migration. A joint declaration was signed by ministers from EU countries, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Western Balkans and Turkey.\(^{31}\)

**Preliminary assessments.** The Visegrad Group has already served as inspiration to the Western Balkan countries, as demonstrated by CEFTA and the “Western Balkan Fund.” Another form of inspiration might be the specific Central European or Visegrad path of political and socio-economic transformation as well as experience with the EU (and NATO) integration processes. In this context, however, one has to be aware that newer experiences with the integration processes provided primarily by Croatia might be increasingly more relevant and therefore more attractive for the remaining countries in the region. This might possibly decrease interest in the V4 experience in some areas. However, interest in the Visegrad model of regional cooperation might remain unchanged or even increase as intra-regional cooperation in the Western Balkans develops.

On the political level, the Visegrad Group proved to be a committed advocate of the Western Balkans in the EU and supporter of the integration ambitions of the Western Balkan countries. The maintenance of the tradition to organise one Visegrad Plus Western Balkans ministerial meeting a year serves as evidence that the Western Balkan countries can count on the support of the V4 in the future. The involvement of other stakeholders in the political cooperation process, including political directors or heads of analytical departments, is also


\(^{29}\) Among other topics discussed at the meeting were ways to reduce prison populations, patent courts, and the enforcement of execution orders. See: “Report on the Czech Presidency in the Visegrad Group July 2011–June 2012,” www.visegradgroup.eu.

\(^{30}\) The first Ministerial Conference of the Prague Process was held in Prague in April 2009. The ministers responsible for migration issues then adopted a Joint Declaration, which set long-term priorities for cooperation on migration management. In fact, the conference gave a political basis for streamlining the implementation of the Global EU Approach to Migration in the east and in the southeast.

important from the point of view of strengthening ties between the V4 and the region. However, the coordination of official development assistance and its targeting still remain a challenge.

As previously mentioned, the current distribution of votes in the EU Council enables the V4 to play the role of an important advocate for the Western Balkan countries. The new institutional settings will change this favourable situation, and the weight of the V4 measured by votes will decrease. The new status quo, however, might more often bring together V4 and non-V4 EU members or even other groups of countries. The continuation of the enlargement process would require a broader basis of support than solely that of the V4, but it can nevertheless serve as coordinator of the informal “Friends of Enlargement” group in the EU.

An analysis of the presidency programmes and annual reports (2003/2004–2011/2012) shows that sectoral cooperation between the Visegrad Group and Western Balkan countries is still not very intensive. In fact, there is a number of partners from regions other than the Western Balkans whose cooperation with the Visegrad Group is more regular and intensive. Among those countries (or groupings), Bulgaria and Romania especially have played an increasingly important role in the V4 Plus format. From this point of view, the cooperation of the Visegrad Group with the “Eastern Balkans” has overshadowed cooperation with the Western Balkans. It is worth mentioning that the cooperation with Bulgaria and Romania developed significantly after the accession of the two countries to the EU—from this point of view, Croatia also seems to be a strong candidate for enhanced cooperation with the V4 once it joins the EU. Nevertheless, areas such as energy, justice and internal affairs will most probably remain in the interests of the other Western Balkan countries that will also remain outside the EU borders.

**Identifying Future Opportunities**

With the exception of at the political level, cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans has been neither regular nor dynamic. New opportunities in the Western Balkans region can be identified both in sectoral cooperation as well as in terms of more intensive involvement by the International Visegrad Fund.

The development of cooperation on a sectoral level can be managed through more intensive use of the V4 Plus format and the inclusion of more countries. Although the Western Balkans is defined as one of the territorial foreign policy
priorities of the V4, cooperation in the V4 Plus framework has been much more developed with other countries or regions. It might therefore be worth considering launching a specific type of format for cooperation with countries or regions of priority importance. The Western Balkan countries would certainly qualify themselves for inclusion in a “Visegrad Super Plus” formula.

Energy security through the diversification of supply and energy transport routes is going to rank high among the priorities of both the V4 and the Western Balkans. Specific attention will be paid to the building of interconnectors on the North–South axis, while the Western Balkans region will also play an important role in completing other energy transport corridor projects (such as the Southern Corridor). Therefore, more enhanced V4–Western Balkan cooperation would also be largely welcomed by the European Commission.

Issues related to defence were put forward several times in the V4–Western Balkans agenda. Though there is still a lack of successful projects at the V4 level, the experience of the V4 countries in reforming their security systems might be of added value for the Western Balkan countries.

The expected establishment of a V4 high-level working group on transport issues also opens the possibility to include at least some Western Balkan countries in enhanced cooperation. Due to its inclusion in the Central European Transport Corridor (CETC), Croatia is to a certain extent occupying a privileged position in the region, but other countries would possibly be interested in participating in the working group’s debates as well.

Cooperation in the field of justice and home affairs also has good prospects to continue. New possibilities for cooperation are opening in the field of border security and border management, where some V4 countries (e.g., Poland) already have a certain amount of experience with cooperation with their Western Balkan counterparts.\(^\text{32}\) In addition, cooperation among the border guards themselves has developed to a very satisfactory level among the V4, which provides a good basis for developing more intensive contacts with Western Balkan countries.

Other “windows of opportunities” for more intensive cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans would include, for instance, culture and education. Since both sectors are very much in the focus of the International

Visegrad Fund, let us discuss in a more detailed way the Fund’s involvement in the development of V4–Western Balkans cooperation.

The first most challenging task for the IVF concerns the establishment of the “Western Balkan Fund,” which would, at least to some extent, follow the principles on which the IVF is based. This would certainly require the continuation of negotiations with all potential contributors to such a fund and safeguarding the political support for this initiative among as many Western Balkan countries as possible. In light of this, it is difficult to estimate a concrete date for the creation of such a fund, because of some unresolved issues in neighbourly relations (e.g., Serbia–Kosovo) it is even possible that the whole issue will be handed over to the upcoming Hungarian presidency of the Visegrad Group (2013/2014).

What may actually fall during the present Polish presidency is the revitalisation of the Visegrad Plus Programme of the International Visegrad Fund, which—after the creation of separate programmes dedicated to the Eastern Partnership countries—can fully concentrate on the Western Balkans. Joint projects by applicants from the Western Balkan countries and their Visegrad partners should, however, correspond with clearly defined and well-targeted priorities. Non-governmental organisations from the V4 will be able to cooperate with their Western Balkans counterparts even on such important issues as transparency, the fight against corruption or the development of various forms of regional networks or programmes, if only because the V4 non-governmental sector has tangible achievements in these fields.

Regarding more intensive involvement of non-governmental experts in a V4–Western Balkans dialogue, it is possible to highlight an initiative of the last Slovak presidency of the V4 in which the V4 Plus Western Balkans’ ministerial meeting was accompanied by an expert conference. The conference was open to participants from the V4, Western Balkans and other EU countries. Unfortunately, neither the Czech nor Polish V4 presidencies decided to continue this initiative, which would have created an interesting tradition. However, the ambition of the Polish presidency to create a V4 pool of experts on accession negotiations that would back projects supporting the integration of the Western Balkan countries to the EU seems to be a very useful idea.33

Concluding Remarks: Towards a New Model of an Inter-regional Partnership?

The possibilities for cooperation between the Visegrad Group and the Western Balkans are far from being exhausted. The Visegrad Group itself is heading towards a more intensive model of regional partnership, while the Western Balkans are still looking for an efficient and viable form of regional cooperation that would encompass all relevant stakeholders in the region. Thus, cooperation with the Western Balkans most probably would follow a “variable geometry” path. In other words, some models of cooperation held in the V4 Plus format would include individual countries, while others would encompass their various groupings. The composition of these groupings, however, might change as will the priorities proposed by the Visegrad Group.

Nevertheless, besides a revitalised Visegrad Plus Programme that would encompass all of the Western Balkan countries and scholarships dedicated to students from the whole region, political cooperation and support for integration ambitions will most likely remain the most visible domains of inter-regional cooperation between the V4 and the Western Balkans. At a time when a significant number of EU Member States would set the enlargement issue apart from other priorities this claim sounds rather like an achievement. In fact, it is not the issue of Kosovo—on which the V4 countries do not have a common position—but the issue of differentiated integration in the EU and the accompanying challenges that might affect the future of the Visegrad Group’s relations with the Western Balkans the most. The close coordination of positions on the EU level is therefore of vital importance for both the future of the Visegrad Group and the V4–Western Balkans partnership.
Regional cooperation and rationalisation of investments could be almost seen as common sense, especially in a time of austerity resulting from economic difficulties. From this perspective, the appeals coming from NATO after the summit in Chicago or from the EU in the last couple of years putting forward the concepts of Smart Defence or Pooling and Sharing could sound just as redundant. However, the reality of the defence sectors seems to be much more complicated. The barriers to cooperation can be immense no matter if they result from rational strategic analysis or mismanagement driven by a conglomerate of invisible forces and groups that manage to substitute their own profit for national interest.

The current initiatives attempting to stimulate regional cooperation and economies of scale in defence have strong foundations. National budgets have been drained and the defence chapter is one of the first sectors targeted for cuts by most European countries. Indeed, defence usually embraces a substantial part of national budgets, and even a low-percentage cut brings back a relevant amount of money to the budget. Moreover, with the deteriorating economic situation the public becomes more sensitive to “dispensable costs” invested largely in external missions, especially if they become far less successful than originally promised. Last but not least, and following the previous points, what we have been seeing in Europe over the last couple of years could be termed a wave of regionalisation. This new regional, bottom-up dynamic could be understood as an alternative to the previous top-down dynamics of liberalisation driven by the European Commission. Even if no one expected the creation of a “real” common defence market, liberalisation has brought some significant results and reached its current limits. In this sense the regional dynamics is not a substitute but result of development in the highly changing area.

1 Smart Defence (NATO) and Pooling and Sharing (EU) constitute concepts aiming at promoting culture of cooperation among allies while proposing deeper collaboration in developing, acquiring and maintaining military capabilities with the intention safe financial resources.
This article will focus on the prospects of the Visegrad defence cooperation and thus contribute to the recently stimulated debate. The aim of this article is to consider both the potential for as well as barriers to cooperation amongst the Visegrad countries while setting them into the wider perspective of the development of their defence sectors. The idea is not to render a historical description but rather to provide a better understanding of the current state of the Visegrad countries’ armament policies. Therefore, the article will start with a critical reflection of the consolidation of the Central European defence spheres, suggesting that despite a general understanding the consolidation had been fairly incomplete before the uneasy reforms that started only a couple of years ago. A critical overview of the consolidation will bring us to the issue of the substantial investment projects that often became largely irrelevant as they did not meet the army’s needs or expectations. Indeed, before considering any changes in strategic behaviour, it is essential to understand the patterns of the previous failures. That said, it should be also understood that the lack of financial resources has not been only caused by the current economic difficulties but also by the critical failures, intentional or unintentional, in national defence economic management.

After this step, the discussion may proceed to the potential for defence cooperation amongst the Visegrad states. The article will assess its prospects and suggest some fields for cooperation. It should also be emphasised that not all well-intended cooperative projects end up bringing positive results. Hence, we should not suggest and expect a revolution in Visegrad defence cooperation, even if the conditions for the reasons that follow are positive; at least as positive as they have ever been.

Visegrad Countries’ Security and Defence Consolidation Challenged

The Visegrad countries have been often seen as cases of successful transformation with relatively settled security policies and consolidated armed forces. Although several critical issues were gradually reappearing during the last two decades they

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were almost always attributed to the complicated process of post-communist transition. The countries’ defence sectors were mostly evaluated through the merits of their elite units participating in various foreign missions, particularly in the Balkans but also in the Middle East or in Afghanistan. This well-deserved positive image of a small part of the systems allowed blindness to several serious internal problems. Most importantly, even if the countries have revealed standard and consolidated processes in terms of formal security policy, they have essentially failed in strategic defence planning and subsequent acquisition processes.

The debate over consolidation has been dominated by a focus on civil-military relations. This stream of literature conceptualises the relations between the political and military institutions as well as the processes that characterise the day-to-day practices. The first area stresses the issue of legitimate political control over the military that can acquire various forms, even in the closely related transatlantic security community. This notion is mainly based on an analysis of the legal and institutional frameworks that define the power relations within the countries. The latter part of the civil-military literature focuses on the actual functioning of the planning and decision-making processes. The literature builds on the role of the liberal democratic framework that provides a crucial context for these inherently political issues. From a wider perspective, the latter dimension of the civil-military relations debate can be approximated to the various accounts considering the existence and functioning of security and strategic cultures.

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That said, I would argue that whereas both dimensions through which the issue of consolidation has been studied are relevant, the Central European experience strongly indicates the need to add another perspective that enables capturing the weak sides of the Visegrad defence sectors’ consolidation. Indeed, an analysis of both formal and informal democratic control mechanisms may provide answers related to the institutional and legal consolidation. However, the political economy of the internal functioning of the defence sector may show that the alleged political consolidation could only shade systematic disruption. Although the situation on the surface did not indicate any substantial deviations from the Western countries, the lack of strategic culture and the processes surrounding the defence planning and acquisition revealed a different picture.

After 1989 the direct de-Sovietisation was the first and, though politically extremely important, practically still apparently the easiest phase of military reform. From the beginning of the 1990s, the armies began to dismantle the large divisions typical for Warsaw Treaty strategic planning. However, the re-structuralisation and reduction was not connected only with the troops and their equipment but also affected the defence industry. Particularly in what was then Czechoslovakia a large part of the heavy defence industry was closed with direct implications on Czech–Slovak relations since most of the factories were situated in Slovakia. Employment in this sector decreased by half, from roughly 145,000 in the mid 1980s to 75,000 in the early 1990s, and a similar trend also could be observed in Poland, where employment dropped from 260,000 to 180,000 people. Despite some differences, the defence and military reforms in the post-communist Central European states shared many similarities. The ministries of defence became leading actors in the formulation of defence policies as well as in the strategic management of the armed forces. Apart from

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8 The Warsaw Treaty armed forces were organised according to the structure of the Soviet Red Army with the five-level command (regiment, division, army, front, and General Staff). Most of the strategic planning was related to the war in Europe caused by NATO attack.


11 The same applies for Slovakia, even if the process was delayed due to internal political situation. Slovakia was denied NATO membership during the first round of enlargement due to the criticism targeting policies of the nationalist government led by Vladimir Mečiar.
de-Sovietisation, most of the reforming processes were connected with NATO enlargement.\(^\text{12}\)

The establishment of structures for civilian political control of defence policy and policy-making impinged on several challenges that were shared across post-communist Central Europe. Andrew Cottey has summarised the challenges as follows: shifting de facto control of defence policymaking and implementation from general staffs to ministries of defence; “civilianising” defence ministries, which had been almost entirely military organisations; building up cadres of civilian expertise in defence policy; putting in place mechanisms for meaningfully reviewing defence policy; and securing detailed control over defence budgets and expenditures (which had previously been “black boxes” under the control of the military, if anyone at all).\(^\text{13}\) In short, whereas the first three challenges were tackled successfully, the consolidation in the other two failed. This happened not because of a lack of legal and institutional arrangements but largely due to the informal practices hidden behind the arrangements.

The NATO enlargement processes have had a decisively positive impact on Visegrad defence sectors, even if the successful mechanistic emulation brought about a subsequent notion of full consolidation. It was even strengthened by discursively hegemonic Atlanticism that underlined the externally-driven reforms and created a specific political strategic narrative that contributed to the systems’ resistance from internal self-reflection.\(^\text{14}\) This point should not be understood as a critique of strategic aiming but as an important mechanism of legitimisation. While the specialists in foreign missions gained credit for professional performances, the other dimensions of strategic planning related especially to defence acquisition failed to produce a stable and effective system.

From the theoretical perspective, it was apparent already in the early 1990s that the threat-based approach typical of Cold War strategic planning and applied in both blocs would not sufficiently meet the new security environment.


This approach was informed by the analysis of relatively short-term threats, and these were usually assessed through the production of related scenarios. The alternative approach, offering enough adaptability and flexibility for the new dynamic situation, came to be called capabilities-based planning. Contrary to its predecessor, this approach does not focus on a few central threats but considers the security situation as complex. More importantly, it builds on political/strategic guidance focusing on the geopolitical/geo-strategic environment, current and prospective capabilities of potential challengers providing material for setting contingencies and requirements, and finally, financial/budget reflection.

This short overview was necessary to understand the third type of logic that was developed in Central Europe. Despite rejecting the old-style threat-based approach and emulating the capability-based logic, the systems often arrived at a product-based logic. This logic was not driven by a strategic assessment of the threats and capabilities required to secure the state in the current security conditions but started with a specific product that could be purchased by the military regardless of its need or requirement. Although this type of behaviour could be at some point part of a strategy aimed at supporting domestic industrial bases, it also happened many times in cases of foreign acquisitions. While the problem was indeed common to all countries as a result of, euphemistically put, shady practices, the Czech system was even somewhat exceptional. According to the former version of Act 38/1994, amended as late as in 2010, all foreign defence acquisitions were to have been mediated by a legal entity registered in the Czech Republic. Given the minimal potential of the Czech market, it is not surprising that none of the major foreign industrial enterprises registered in the Czech Republic to be able to trade directly with the Ministry of Defence. As a result, a crucial role was attributed to the Czech mediating companies that became the neuralgic points of the entire acquisition system.

Certainly, not all acquisitions from the last two decades were informed by this logic. However, I would argue that one should understand these


circumstances to fully capture the reasons for defence budget austerity. More importantly, the shift towards proper strategic planning and management is a logical condition for various cooperative and pooling and sharing activities. With the previous points in mind, the following lines will shed some light on the Visegrad states’ defence sectors.

**Visegrad Countries’ Defence Sectors:**
**Industrial Development and Potential**

The defence industry of the Visegrad countries reached its peak during the last Cold War decade. The crucial comparatively well-advanced sectors of armament production included fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, armoured as well as unarmoured vehicles, artillery, SALW (small arms and light weapons), all categories of ammunition, and various electronic, telecommunications, guidance, control and optronic systems. Although it is hard to make relevant estimates, it has been projected that the production level had already decreased by 70% by the early 1990s. Although all the countries were heavily affected by the new conditions, the Hungarian potential especially decreased significantly as the technological base there was almost absolutely dependent on Soviet technological and market assistance.\(^{18}\) On the other hand, most of these strong production categories at least partially survived within the national industrial bases. Before turning to the development in all four countries, the article will present some data to illustrate the current state.

Table

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<th>Visegrad countries defence data</th>
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1. *Defence expenditures in € million.*
2. *NATO statistics, only %GDP.*

\(^{18}\) Y. Kiss, *op. cit.*
The 2010 defence expenditures of the Visegrad countries combined (€10,283 million) are comparable to the Spanish expenditures (€11,132 million) and approximate the Dutch and Belgian expenditures combined (€12,423 million), which is comparatively interesting since back in 2003 the Netherlands itself covered or almost covered the entire Visegrad defence budget. Apart from Poland, all of the countries invested only roughly 1% GDP in defence in 2010, which is indeed far from the 2% advised by NATO. At the same time it should be noted that the NATO–Europe average is 1.6%. Thinking about potential regional cooperation there is also one more figure worth mentioning. Investments into R&D (incl. R&T) are woeful. Whereas Poland invested at least 2% and the Czech Republic roughly 1% of their budgets in this area, the Hungarian and Slovak investments were far below 1%. Indeed, all of the figures are apparently far below the EU average since the combined share of all EDA members reached 4.4% in 2010.

Czech Republic. Besides the current budgetary cuts, the Czech defence sector was also hit by the fiscal crisis in 2003. However, at the time the defence budget still consumed 2% annual GDP. Since the late 1990s, its modernisation investment largely covered the procurement of L-159 ALCA (Advanced Light Combat Aircraft) fighters produced by Aero Vodochody Inc. The project was openly linked with the endeavour to support one of the traditional Czech aviation engineering companies. The state accepted a guarantee for a bank loan worth up to 1.62 billion CZK ($80 million) for the development and construction of the fighter. According to the contract between the Ministry of Defence and Aero Vodochody Inc., the government was obligated to purchase 72 fighters by 2004 for more than 30 billion CZK ($1.5 billion). Nevertheless, the final bank loan guarantees grew significantly after another request for 2.5 billion CZK ($125 million), and the final price reached more than 50 billion CZK ($2.5 billion). In

the end, the commercial success of the L-159s was minimal and most of the useless aircraft have been mothballed at substantial additional cost. A crucial deal in the aeronautics sector was related to the lease of 14 JAS-39 Gripen fighters from a British-Swedish consortium. The 10-year lease will last until 2013 and cost $978 million with a 130% offset attached to the agreement. In 2009, the government also decided to procure military transport aircraft. Even though the army opposed the selection the deal was made with the EADS/CASA consortium and four CASA C-295M aircraft were bought for 3.5 billion CZK ($175 million). Since the contract was awarded without EU-wide tendering procedures, the European Commission referred the Czech Republic to the EU Court of Justice.\(^{25}\) The case was conditionally revoked only following a serious diplomatic effort.

The Czech Republic also started a project to modernise original Soviet T-72 MBTs (main battle tanks), which had been operational in all of the Visegrad countries. This strategically fundamentally flawed programme was several times adjusted, ending up with just 30 modernised vehicles (from the originally planned 350) with a final bill reaching 4.5 billion CZK ($225 million) in 2002. Similar to the L-159 fighters, there was some recent hopes that some of the stock could be exported.\(^{26}\) Several major procurements for land forces also included the Pandur wheeled armoured vehicle from the Steyr company that have been criticised on the basis of size, price as well as utility. Even though the original plan to procure 199 vehicles for 20.8 billion CZK ($1.04 billion) was reduced to half as the Czech government finally purchased 99 vehicles for 14.4 billion CZK ($720 million), the utilisation of the vehicles still remains unclear.\(^{27}\) Another major procurement concerned the Iveco light armoured vehicles that were purchased without a tender. During the process, the price grew to 3.69 billion CZK ($190 million) for 90 vehicles. A smaller portion of the vehicles were supposed to be used in Afghanistan together with another procured vehicle that together were to symbolise the “golden age” of acquisitions before the budgetary exhaustion. In September 2009, the Czech government sealed a contract with the

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\(^{25}\) “Public procurement: Commission closes its investigations concerning the purchase of military transport aircraft by the Czech Republic,” http://europa.eu.


German Krauss-Maffei Wegmann Company, procuring 15 Dingo-2 wheeled armoured vehicles for 499 million CZK ($25 million), which is right below the cutoff at which an offset would be required.\textsuperscript{28}

The Czech Republic has apparently been where several ill-thought or ill-intentioned decisions have fundamentally contributed to the critical budgetary situation. Additionally, despite several major acquisitions, the offset instrument has been used rather exceptionally. That said, the Czech industrial base still posits decent potential in the areas of aviation, military transport vehicles, armoured vehicles, military electronics and communication systems, surveillance systems, ammunition and light weapons and CBRN detection and protection. The lack of resources can be critical, especially from an R&D perspective where the financing is clearly insufficient, and hence creates many obstacles to future competition.

**Hungary.** The Hungarian defence budget experienced a fundamental drop immediately after 1989, and although it grew partially before NATO membership, it remained the lowest in terms of percent GDP among the Visegrad countries. A crucial deal in the aeronautics sector was made in 2003 when the Hungarian government signed a 10-year lease for 14 JAS-39 Gripens. The deal was worth 210 billion HUF ($950 million) over 15 years with the offset reaching 110% of the contract value.\textsuperscript{29} The offset programme was also attached to a deal with Kongsberg Defence Communications, which supplied radio systems for $128 million; when the offset programme should reach $210 million, that should be largely invested in this particular sector. Finally, an offset programme worth $112 million also was included in an agreement with Matra Defence, which supplied Mistral-2 air defence missiles.\textsuperscript{30} Quite interestingly, the SIPRI arms transfer database does not show any other substantial foreign procurements.\textsuperscript{31} Nevertheless, the Hungarian government also decided to support the national producer of Rába unarmoured vehicles, in deals totalling more than $1.1 billion. Similar to the Czech Republic and Poland, Hungary has also invested in the CBRN sector and modernisation of former Soviet Mi-type helicopters.\textsuperscript{32} In

\textsuperscript{28} For details see: *ibidem.*
\textsuperscript{29} T. Behr, A. Siwiecki, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
\textsuperscript{32} T. Behr, A. Siwiecki, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–27.
general, Hungarian industrial and technological potential includes upgrading and maintaining aircraft and armoured vehicles, defence electronics, radar and telecommunications systems, ammunition, handguns and protective clothing.\textsuperscript{33} Much of the once extremely strong military electronics sector turned to civilian production or disappeared. Despite at least three major offset programmes, the Hungarian industrial base has been declining, and hence sharing the track with the defence budget.

**Poland.** Given its size and ambitions, Poland is by far the biggest absolute as well as relative investor in the defence sector. It is also the only Visegrad country that more less successfully aspires for a relatively complete domestic industrial base. A substantial part of the base has been strengthened by licensed production, basically resembling extensive direct offset agreements. The most extensive of these programmes has been a deal related to the procurement of 48 F-16C/D fighters including further technologies for $3.5 billion, where the offset should reach about $6 billion. Although the programme generated a massive amount of money, its management was criticised as being ill-managed and hence not delivering expected results.\textsuperscript{34} Another offset programme was attached to the acquisition of eight C-295 military transport aircraft from EADS/CASA, which should reach 100\% of the $212 million contract value. Leaving the aeronautics sector, a licensed production agreement has also been connected with the procurement of 690 armoured modular vehicles from the Finnish company Patria for $1.25 billion in which the offset should reach 69\% of the contract value. The offset arrangement was also connected with navy procurement, where the Polish government signed a contract with the German shipyard Blohm&Voss for the acquisition of two A-100 frigates.\textsuperscript{35} This procurement was established as the foundation of the warship-building project that was terminated as highly inefficient in 2012.\textsuperscript{36} Also in the naval segment, Poland procured naval strike missiles worth $232 million from the Norwegian Kongsberg company.\textsuperscript{37} Substantial resources were also invested under the agreement on the acquisition

\textsuperscript{33} Ibidem, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{34} A. Otrębski, “Informacja o wynikach kontroli realizacji zobowiązań offsetowych wynikających z kontraktu na zakup samolotów F-16,” Supreme Audit Office, Poland, www.nik.gov.pl.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibidem, pp. 34–35.
\textsuperscript{36} ORP Slazak / Gawron / Projekt 621 (Meko A 100), GlobalSecurity, www.globalsecurity.org.
of anti-tank missile and missiles launchers from Israeli Rafael Armaments Development. This contract was worth $397 million, and the offset should reach $826 million.

Apart from these major deals, Poland has also invested in the modernisation of Mi-24 helicopters and has received a considerable amount of military equipment through military aid programmes including Leopard-2 tanks and 23 MiG-29 aircraft from Germany, two frigates including navy helicopters from the U.S. and submarines from Norway.\(^{38}\) In general, the Polish defence sector is relatively uncluttered since major companies are gathered in two strong state-controlled capital groups—Bumar, dominating the armoured vehicles and ammunition sectors, and ARP, focusing on the aeronautics sector. As previously noted, the Polish potential could cover virtually all military segments. Although the industrial base has been developing and Poland, substituting Cold War Czechoslovakia, is by far the biggest producer of military material among the Visegrad countries, it still was a substantial importer. Between 2004 and 2008, Polish imports were more than four times as high as exports, and Polish exports dropped below Belgium, the Netherlands and even Switzerland.\(^{39}\)

**Slovakia.** Slovakia has displayed only a modest level of ambition, even if it used to harbour a substantial part of the Czechoslovak heavy defence industry. Even with the delay regarding NATO membership, Slovakia managed to keep a relatively stable defence budget that began to fall only recently. Most of the efforts after 1989 were connected with upgrade and modernisation programmes. In the aeronautics sector, the Slovak government decided to upgrade L-39 and L-410 jets, AN-26 military transport aircraft and Mi-17 helicopters. Additionally, the Slovak air force has been based on a fleet of MiG-29 subsonic jets, whose maintenance has been essential since Slovakia is the only Visegrad country that has not procured supersonics. Several upgrades of the former Warsaw Treaty-style equipment were also made in other countries, namely Egypt and Angola.\(^{40}\)

The Slovakian defence industrial base provides some potential in the areas of artillery systems and mortars, rocket launchers and ammunition as well as armoured vehicles. In most of these areas, Slovak companies operate as part of the supply chains that are often connected to the Czech defence companies.

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\(^{38}\) T. Behr, A. Siwiecki, *op. cit.*, p. 35.


\(^{40}\) T. Behr, A. Siwiecki, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
This overview of the defence industrial potential in these countries has revealed several moments relevant for further defence cooperation considerations. The Visegrad countries share several capabilities and potential that are related to the former Warsaw Treaty defence systems. Although from a certain perspective this situation could provide some room for burden-sharing and division of labour, in the end the dimension of the common overlap has rather seemed to antagonise the actors. In fact, many national companies serve as direct competitors, especially on the Asian and African markets, where Soviet technologies are still employed. Moreover, Visegrad has rich historical experience with failures regarding attempts to establish cooperative projects for upgrades or modernisation of former Soviet military transport aircraft and subsonic jets, Soviet and Polish helicopters, Soviet-style T-72 tanks, or Czech subsonic jets. Even if we accept the perspective that the lack of cooperation was influenced by unconsolidated practices in all four defence sectors, given the existential dimension of these activities for several major companies, it is rather unrealistic to expect any cooperative potential in this regard.

It should also be noted that the modernisation and upgrade business has been declining with the proliferation of other modern and still affordable technologies. Moreover, even in this area future success is largely based on efficient development of R&D (R&T) and innovation areas, which, however, have been clearly underestimated in the Visegrad states. According to the European Innovation Scoreboard, providing analysis of innovation drivers, structural conditions for innovation, knowledge innovation, creation investment in R&D activities, innovation entrepreneurship and application of innovation, the added value in terms of labour and business, all of the Visegrad countries fall among the “Moderate Innovators,” which is only the third group out of four. Moreover, it is only the Czech Republic that has the potential to close the gap with the first two groups, “Innovation Followers” and “Leaders.”

Although this analysis encompasses all fields, the data noted previously reveal that the defence sectors have been rather weaker from the R&D perspective.

Nevertheless, the Visegrad countries still harbour some potential that could be explored through supply chains with the major Western primes. Indeed, as noted, several links have already been established and the supply chains could cross the region as the areas differ fundamentally from the modernisation and upgrade programmes targeted at the Asian and African countries. A recent study

contracted by EDA analysed the potential of the technological and industrial defence bases in the EU-12 vis-à-vis the future demand from the EU-15. Although the EU-12 also involves other relatively strong defence bases, the Visegrad countries’ potential is more than relevant. According to this study, the supply chains with the primes (BAE Systems, EADS, Finmeccanica, Thales) could include infantry modernisation, armoured fighting vehicles, high-performance aircraft, high-performance special purpose ships, unmanned platforms and robotics, precision weapons, beyond-visual-range weapons, directed energy weapons, and CBRN defence technologies.42

**Strengthening Visegrad Cooperation**

The Visegrad countries have several prerequisites for successful cooperation, but at the same time quite a rich experience with failures of common defence projects. Several problems were apparently caused by uncooperative logic that articulated the particular interests of various national groups. These processes influenced not only collaborative defence industry projects but also potential common acquisitions. At the same time, part of the problem may be found in the natural competitiveness of the sectors, which could also spill over to other areas. Indeed, given their common externally directed past, the countries often reveal similar capacities, especially in maintaining former Soviet technologies spread around the world. Also, the development of national defence technology and industrial bases was largely based on offset programmes and licensed production that offered limited space for other international cooperation. Although the offset and license-related programmes brought highly needed resources, the nature of the agreement often remained rather exclusive. Last but not least, apart from the political will, which could have been influenced by various actors, any international collaborative project must involve skilful and motivated management responsible for the technical negotiation and course of the project. Moreover, this expert potential must be present in both business as well as state administration (mainly MoD) environments.

Nevertheless, it has been already noted that the current conditions are rather unprecedented. The fiscal crisis has fundamentally influenced expense side of the budgets and especially defence sectors have experienced severe cuts. It should also be recalled that defence budgets would have encountered trouble even without the current crisis since the defence economies largely failed to

produce sustainable and effective management of the defence sector. From this perspective, reform processes related to the management of the fiscal crisis to a large extent merge with the reforms necessary for establishing a functioning and efficient system. Also in line with structural conditions, both the EU and NATO have developed frameworks for supporting pooling and sharing of resources. From another perspective, regionalisation could be viewed as an alternative continuation of the efforts originally stimulated by the EU’s crucial political decisions and liberalisation efforts in the past decade.

These conditions could be attached to those that have been repeated regularly. From various perspectives the Visegrad countries constitute a region sharing similar historical experiences, geopolitical concerns and political challenges connected with their transformation and re-orientation. More importantly, they also have broadly similar strategic cultures, even if a closer look reveals some differences. Additionally, they also experienced the same type of socialisation into the Western political and security structures, including the experience coming from more or less similar foreign missions and operations. All these factors provide positive potential for cooperation, even if they have seemed to be too weak to stimulate the cooperation or create a collaboration-prone environment.

The article will later suggest several more specific activities that have a realistic potential of becoming subjects of regional cooperation. Even if it is tempting to include some major projects (e.g., a new round of negotiations over supersonics in the Czech Republic and Hungary), the goals should stay rather modest. My intention here is to provide some complementary ideas to the DAV4 Expert Group Report, which provides some insightful conclusions and recommendations.

The recently agreed Visegrad Battle Group is the logical step, and in this sense we can already observe some positive movement given the fact that the Visegrad countries were not able to come to agreement in the previous time

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frame. I would not overestimate the socialising effect of this military formation since the militaries have gone through common socialisation within NATO structures. However, the battlegroup could become an important hub of regional cooperation in several respects. First, it could develop into a permanent structure and thus create institutional memory, which can be a crucial factor for sustainable cooperation. Second, the battlegroup is a relatively small unit and therefore appropriate for pilot cooperative projects related to its capabilities but can gradually develop into more complex projects. More practically, reflecting national potentials, the first projects could be related to capabilities in the areas of medical support and logistics, or communications and command-and-control systems. In these capabilities, the Visegrad countries are fully self-sufficient. If successfully developed the countries could consider more complex cooperative efforts involving personnel equipment and potentially even issues that might involve common acquisition moves. Third, the current EU battlegroup concept could be extended in several ways. The first issue is to have a permanent structure that can be flexibly adjusted according to interests and challenges. In this sense, the battlegroup concept has received a new understanding in the context of the current regional round of European defence-building. The other extension could be connected to the weakness of the EU battlegroups, which is their low potential for deployability. In this sense the battlegroup could be flexibly enriched by a civilian component, and hence become eligible for a wider range of missions.

As implicitly noted several times already, there is great potential for cooperation in training and education. All four countries have their own military education institutions that suffer from a lack of resources as well as students, and hence have become highly ineffective. At the same time, long-term experience shows that international institutions fundamentally enhance the approximation of security cultures and help overcome a mutual lack of confidence. There are some patterns of similar institutions that could serve as inspiration (e.g., NATO Defence College or the closer, regionally-based Baltic Defence College). Apart

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47 Both institutions provide long-term and short-term courses for military as well as civilian personnel coming from and heading to national as well as international structures. See: www.ndc.nato.int; www.bdcol.ee.
from traditional military training, special emphasis could be put on courses about defence and acquisition management. This would be beneficial in opening the institutions to experts from other countries (Austria, Netherlands, Sweden) that have great experience with the fields. A common training or educational institution should bring about a more effective use of resources while also stimulating cooperative thinking largely absent in all the national military institutions at present.

From a wider perspective, Visegrad cooperation should be inclusive. The political and strategic priorities could include cooperative frameworks with Ukraine (V4 Battlegroup Plus Ukraine) or Estonia (CBRN battalion). However, attention could also be turned to other regional partners. Interestingly, Austria has a comparable technological and industrial defence base and significant experience with various international projects. One of the inspiring concepts currently developed by the Austrians is the concept of a “user’s club.” This arrangement does not build on common acquisitions, which is usually very challenging, but on the common life-cycle management that is often also very demanding in the defence area. In this sense, the countries could share some maintenance costs, which could be distributed according to the existing potential capability.

Given the structural market pressures as well as obsolescence of the former Warsaw Treaty equipment, the sustainability of the Visegrad countries’ defence and technological bases will be more dependent on R&D investment. It has been noted that this is clearly a weak side of the Visegrad defence sector. Therefore, the countries should attempt to make full use of strategic management of supranational instruments. In this sense, the countries should be able to formulate common projects that could be supported by industrial primes within the EDA projects framework. Again, apart from the political will and support this would be a task for creative defence managers who would get experience in common educational and training institutions.

Finally, the potential hidden in the various centres of excellence should be fully used. In this sense I agree with the conclusions developed in a report that proposes a Joint Counter-IED centre based on the Centre of Excellence in Slovakia and the creation of the V4 CBRN defence battalion based on the CBRN capabilities present in all Visegrad countries, a concept that would also need some educational and training support. At the same time, testing facilities are essential for the standardisation and certification processes that crucially operationalise the political decisions. The same report suggests the creation of
a V4 Cyber Defence Initiative based on the close cooperation among the V4 Computer Emergency Response Teams. This initiative should also include the NATO Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. Even if the initiative would be beneficial, I would question the Visegrad Plus’ capacities in this area, where the leaders are highly up front about it. Nevertheless the entire issue of critical infrastructure protection and critical information infrastructure protection deserves further attention as EU initiatives and slowly developing policies provide great opportunities for the future. One of the crucial steps would be to establish platforms for public-private partnership that would be able to formulate common needs and priorities to further transform into specific projects.

Before suggesting some specific programmes and modes of cooperation for the Visegrad countries, the article has argued that the current critical situation has not been caused solely by structural economic pressures. Indeed, even if recently there have been signs of improvement in the Central European defence and military sectors, they require new attitudes and approaches to function effectively. Improvement of the overall economic conditions would not be sufficient if resources are lost in intentionally or unintentionally ineffective structures. Also, regional and international cooperation could play a positive role in setting and maintaining higher standards.
The End of a “Beautiful Friendship?”
U.S. Relations with the Visegrad Countries under Barack Obama (2009–2013)

Introduction

“Central Europe suffered when the United States succumbed to ‘realism’ at the Yalta Conference.”¹ This statement was made in 2009, in an open letter to President Barack Obama, whose neo-realistic foreign policy was very often perceived as wiping the region from the U.S. agenda. For many distinguished Central European intellectuals and politicians, including Václav Havel, Michal Kováč, János Martonyi and Lech Wałęsa, who signed up the letter, Obama’s moderate interest in developments in the region, coupled with the United States’ “reset” with Russia, raised the ghosts of the 1945 Yalta Conference. There, another Democrat president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, attempted to sacrifice freedom for the sake of stability, and in doing so he allowed smaller countries such as Poland to come under the control of the Communist U.S.S.R. Of course, things have changed, and neither Obama nor Central Europe face the dilemmas that followed the Second World War. But the disappointment of the Central European signatories to the letter may be somehow understandable due to the fact that countries from the region have lost their place “at the heart of American foreign policy,”² where they seemed to be for more than 20 years.

In fact, many feel that relations between the U.S. and Central Europe during the past two decades were a “beautiful friendship.” The phrase, uttered by Rick Blaine in the iconic movie *Casablanca,*³ seems to summarise the long-lasting era, which began with the strong leadership of Ronald Reagan; indeed, it is no coincidence that the 100th anniversary of the former president’s birth in 2011 was celebrated enthusiastically in many Central European countries, including

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² Ibidem.
³ The very final line in the movie is: “Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.” It was said by the main positive figure, Rick Blaine (played by Humphrey Bogart) to a French self-confessed corrupt official, Louis Renault (Claude Rains).
Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. True, Reagan was in office during the dark last years of the Cold War—an extraordinary and unprecedented period—but his successors from the post-1989 period, when democracy and the free market reached Central and Eastern Europe, enjoy a good reputation in these countries too. President Bill Clinton supported NATO expansion in the region in the 1990s, marking its complete separation from the so-called Eastern Bloc. George W. Bush in turn—confronted with 9/1—viewed Central Europe as a new and reliable ally in the struggle against global terrorism and anti-democratic changes in many post-Soviet states. Consequently, many regional commentators perceived Central Europe to have an important role in the U.S. agenda. Those same commentators—as the 2009 letter shows—found it shocking that Obama had discovered “the heart of American foreign policy” somewhere else.

It seems, though, that the view of an enduring, “beautiful friendship” between the U.S. and Central Europe is bit idealistic. There are other perspectives too, all the more so because this relationship cannot be described as anything other than asymmetric. Reagan drew a lot of attention to the region not because of its unique political features, but because the U.S. treated it as another stage on which to play out its struggle with the U.S.S.R. Although Clinton and Bush continued to praise the region, its position has never been as strong as it was during the Reagan years, slowly giving way to the Middle East or China. And the allegedly pro-Russian Obama would never repeat Bush’s words about “getting a sense of Putin’s soul.”

In fact, the last two decades do not illustrate a gradual strengthening of the “beautiful friendship,” but its declining importance in U.S. foreign policy. It would, therefore, be an exaggeration to say that Obama abandoned Central Europe. Indeed, Obama’s first tenure did not mean an unexpected break with Central Europe, but it was rather a logical consequence of 20 years of changes in U.S. foreign policy, as well as other global developments.

This paper aims to analyse U.S. policy towards Central Europe, particularly the Visegrad Group (V4), during the first Obama tenure (2009–2013). It focuses
on the V4 since—as will be seen in the conclusion—the regional format may become an effective tool for rebuilding U.S. interest in the region, which is particularly important for Poland—the biggest V4 country in terms of size, economy and international influence, and which holds the 2012–2013 V4 presidency. The first part of the paper explores the reasoning and interests that contributed to the parting of the ways between the U.S. and Central Europe. It briefly covers recent global developments, which received different responses from the two, as well as significant changes in the position of both Central Europe and the EU in a global context. The next three chapters analyse the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Poland’s V4 partners: the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, in order to provide better insight into Obama’s strategy in the region (“bilateralism over the strategic partnership”), and to acquaint the Polish observers and decision-makers with the problems and challenges that the other V4 members faced in their relations with the U.S. The last section offers a pro-active agenda for relations between the U.S. and the V4, discussing ways in which they can be strengthened.

Lost in Translation:
Records of Divergence between the U.S. and Central Europe

The U.S. does not have a clear Central European policy, but it still has interests in individual countries from the region, including the V4 members. This bilateralism may be said to summarise relations between 2009 and 2013. Washington stopped seeing Central Europe from the strategic perspective of the Reagan period, and limited its view to its own economic, energy or security needs. Clear bilateralism, then, and, with the exception of Afghanistan, nothing more. There are at least five reasons for this.

Firstly, Central Europe is no longer an area of key geopolitical developments, as it was at the end of the 1980 or 1990s. The countries of the former Eastern Bloc or—as Donald Rumsfeld described it—“the New Europe”6 have since joining the Euro-Atlantic structures been considered by American decision-makers as safe and peaceful places faced no real security threats, and which therefore can take care of themselves from now on. It seems that, according to Washington, Central Europe, is a mission accomplished. It was even literally expressed by Vice-President Joe Biden, who during his visit to Bucharest in October 2009 said: “In America, we no longer think in terms of

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what we can do for Central Europe, but rather in terms of what we can do with
Central Europe.”7

In fact it is not only Central Europe, but the whole continent that has been
escaping the American view.8 The U.S. has focused particularly on other parts of
the world, and it is not hard to guess why. Obama seems to have reacted
accurately to the recent developments: the EU is desperately searching for a way
out from a deep economic and institutional crisis, playing a very small role in
dealing with global challenges, while the potential of the BRIC Group (Brazil,
Russia, India and China) and Turkey have increased significantly. Hence, the
Obama administration’s ambition was to engage itself in building a strong,
multi-polar global order by expending the global powers’ responsibilities and
focusing them on the most pressing issues in the world. Initially, this was also
the intention of a new Russian policy, which, though—after the spectacular
failure of the “reset” doctrine—turned out to be the biggest disappointment to
Washington. Nevertheless, this strategy gave Europe at best a marginal position.
Symbolically, the decreasing role of Europe was evidenced by a surprisingly
high number of diplomatic mis-steps, which—not without reason—were
perceived indignantly in Europe as a sign of disrespect.9

It is hard to avoid the impression that, between the U.S. and Central Europe,
there is also a significant difference on defining the main global threats and
challenges. From the regional point of view they are connected with the EU
crisis as well as fears of Russia’s imperial ambitions, while for Washington they

7 J. Biden, “America—Central Europe Partnership for the 21st Century,” speech given in
Bucharest, 22 October 2009.
8 M. Leonard, I. Krastev, “Widmo Europy wielobiegunowej,” Batory Foundation,
www.batory.org.pl.
9 Among the most troublesome missteps are: cancellation of the U.S.–EU Summit in May 2010 at
the Obama’s initiative, his absence at both the celebration of the 70th Anniversary of II World
War in September 2009 and 20th Anniversary of the fall of Berlin Wall two months later.
Moreover, Obama administration announced the decision of scraping the missile defense shield
plans in the middle of the night (to the Czech government) and on the 17 September 2009, which
is the Anniversary of the Soviet aggression in 1939 (to the Polish government). Poland felt also
affected, when Obama misspoke in May 2012 on “Polish death camps,” while he should have
called it a “German death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland.” Anne Applebaum also paid attention
to the fact that to many EU countries there were send not professional diplomats for the
positions of ambassadors, but rather sponsors of the Democratic Party election campaign. This
is true in terms of many Central European states, including Hungary, Slovakia and initially the
Czech Republic. See: “Letting Europe Drift,” The Washington Post, 22 September 2009,
footnote 14 for more.
are rooted in the Middle East and the Asia-Pacific region. In these areas, according to the Obama administration, are concentrated the crucial problems of the modern world, including Iran’s nuclear plans, Islamic terrorism, rivalry for access to energy sources and armed conflicts involving international troops. Since winter 2010/2011, this part of the world has also drawn attention also because of massive social protests leading to the collapse of long-standing dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya.

Russia is another reason. In March 2009, American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, along with her Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, announced in Geneva the famous “reset” in U.S.–Russia relations. From the beginning it was difficult to foretell its success, due to an unfortunate translation error that changed “reset” (perezagruzka) to “overcharge” (peregruzka). Nevertheless, at that time it seemed that pragmatic Washington was responding astutely to the new winds that blew from the east. The newly elected president of Russia, Dmitry Medvedev, promised the liberalisation and modernisation of the country, openly declaring his will to cooperate with the U.S. in those spheres in which both states shared interests (Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, nuclear power reduction). For Central Europe it was a problem. Many regional commentators noticed that Obama was no longer eager to criticise Russia for human rights violations, or to promote democracy in the post-Soviet area, which they saw as a result of his soft policy towards Russia. Obama also abandoned plans to deploy the U.S. Missile Defence System in Poland and the Czech Republic, a project of which Moscow had been highly critical. The reset, though, turned out to be a political and public relations failure for the United States, and increasingly so since autumn 2011, when bilateral relations began to deteriorate again.

However, the importance of Central Europe was also reduced because of domestic factors and internal problems of individual countries, such as deepening differences in their economic situations and in their views on the future of the EU. The U.S. would also expect Central Europe to be able to speak with one voice, which it did not do during Obama’s visit to Poland in May 2011. The two-day Central Europe summit, where Obama was to join 20 regional leaders as a special guest, was boycotted by two countries, Romania and Serbia, and because of Slovakia ended without reaching a consensus declaration.10 This was because of the presence of the representative of Kosovo, which none of the

three recognises. Apart from the lack of unity amongst Central European nations, the U.S. might be perplexed by the surprisingly high level of scepticism towards Obama in the region, where his performance received a much less enthusiastic response than it did in Western Europe.

The Czech Republic: Still in the Game

It seems that the U.S. no longer wants a “strategic partnership” with Central Europe. This, though, does not mean that the region has been completely abandoned by the Obama administration. Being more focused on issues in the Pacific and the Middle East, as well as developments in Russia, China and the whole BRIC group, the U.S. has simply changed its Central European strategy. It became less region-oriented and more focused on searching for fields of pragmatic cooperation with individual countries. For this reason, the Czech Republic, a country of a size of a small U.S. state, was able to hold American attention much more effectively than could other Visegrad countries.

At the beginning it seemed, though, that it would be different. Over two years (January 2009–January 2011) the U.S. refused to send an ambassador to Prague, which in international relations is often followed by a serious bilateral crisis.\(^{11}\) Even if this lack of diplomatic representation in the Czech Republic indicated only American messiness and excessive red tape, Washington’s next move left no doubts that the relationship was in trouble. In September 2009, Obama, following the official Democrat line, which called Bush’s Missile Defence System “wasteful spending,” abandoned the initial plan to deploy the elements of the system in Poland (a battery of interceptor missiles) and the Czech Republic (a tracking radar).\(^ {12}\)

The Polish observers reacted with annoyance, voicing concern that the country had already lost its special status in Washington. However, Obama’s...

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\(^{11}\) The two-year crisis with the U.S. ambassador in the Czech Republic was caused by both lack of proper candidate and on-going procedure in the U.S. Senate. Initially, it was Mark Nathanson, a wealthy businessman with no experience in diplomacy, who made his fortune in TV and media business, that was supposed to become the ambassador. However, eventually he decided to give up, just before his first hearing before the U.S. Senate. The next Obama’s choice became Norman Eisen, a lawyer and son of Polish-Czechoslovak marriage. This candidature was first blocked by Republicans in the Senate, and only later—in December 2011—finally approved.

shift was met with a rather lukewarm response in the Czech Republic. Certainly, Czech officials expressed their disappointment, not only in the decision itself, but also that it had been communicated in the middle of the night. There were, though, significant differences between Polish and Czech expectations towards the Missile Defence System. Firstly, the traditionally pro-American Czech society this time turned its back on the United States, with opposition to the sitting of the system on Czech territory sometimes reaching 70%. In comparison, opposition in Poland oscillated between 30–50%.\(^{13}\)

But it was not only the difference in social moods that made it less painful for the Czech Republic to accept the U.S. cancellation. While in Poland the question of the Missile Defence System was one of very few topics that unified the governing centre-right Civic Platform (PO) and the main opposition party, Law and Justice (PiS), sitting further to the right in the Polish political spectrum, in the Czech Republic this initiative gave rise to much greater political controversies. In 2006–2010, there was no consensus even within Mirek Topolanek’s centre-right government, since the smaller coalition partner, the Green Party, explicitly rejected that idea. So did the opposition Czech Social Democratic Party and the Communists.\(^{14}\) Influential president Václav Klaus also had mixed feelings, highlighting the system’s possible anti-Russian character. It is thus hard to escape the impression that, in the Czech Republic, many took Obama’s decision with relief.

Logically these new developments could have weakened the Czech Republic’s approach to the U.S. And they probably would have, if Czechs did not succeed in finding a niche in their American policy which offered mutual benefits for both sides. This niche turned out to be energy. The Czech Republic, uniquely among the Central European states, has invested whole-heartedly in nuclear energy, which by 2060 should provide 60% of the country’s power. As a result of this policy, it was decided in 2009 that the Temelin Nuclear Power Station in South Bohemia should be expanded through the addition of new reactor blocks. The resulting tender, worth around $28 billion, attracted many

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foreign investors, including French, Russian and American, specifically Westinghouse Electric Company LLC. It is no surprise then, that U.S. Ambassador Norman Eisen, after taking up the diplomatic post following a two-year interregnum, admitted that one of his primary tasks in Prague is to promote Westinghouse’s bid.  

Temelin is a trump card for the Czechs, and they seem to know how to play it. After the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in Japan, the Czech government tactically delayed the tender selection from 2011 until 2013. President Klaus’ open support for the Russian bid further stoked the fire. America, therefore, has real reasons for concerns, and so treat Temelin not just as another example of a regional rivalry with Moscow. It is—above all—a great business. As Eisen stated: “This is not only about one deal, but rather about the presence of the company and its country in the Czech Republic for the next hundred years.”

That is why Prague is pragmatically seeking to receive as much as possible in exchange for the tender. On the table already lies the 1991 Czech–U.S. investment protection agreement, which is seen in the Czech Republic as favourable towards U.S. investors. The issue, which had been a thorn in the side of all Czech governments, was somehow moved, when in July 2011 Hillary Clinton agreed to renegotiate the agreement. Secondly, the Transalpine Pipeline (TAL), covering the development of oil transport interconnectors between Italy, Austria and Germany with a line to the Czech Republic, is also owned by two American corporations. The Czechs have long tried to gain the U.S. stakes in TAL as a strategic investment that would lighten the country’s reliance on the Druzhba pipeline from Russia. And thirdly, the Czech government is considering buying U.S. F-16 fighter planes when a new contract to replace its Swedish JAS-39 Gripens is drawn up in 2015.

Of course, Temelin has not the strategic meaning of the Missile Defence System, but it is also true that one plays as the opponent allows. In economic terms, the U.S. could be also interested in the shale gas that has been identified on Czech territory. However, the gas itself arouses many economic, political and ecological controversies in the country and it is rather unlikely that the Czech government will allow its exploitation in the near future.20

What also strengthens the Czechs’ position is their involvement in Afghanistan21—the basic measure of the U.S. partners’ loyalty, as well as the fact that the Czech Republic has since August provided consular services for the U.S. in Syria. This and the things mentioned above make the country by far the most important V4 partner for the U.S. After all, Obama decided to give his “European speech of the year 2009” in Prague. One year later he again chose Prague, as the place to sign a major agreement on nuclear arms reduction with his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev. It seems, though, that for the Czechs it was nothing but prestige, incomparable with the iconic Bill Clinton’s 1994 visit, but at a time when Obama’s attitude towards Central Europe appears cold, it is still worthy of note.

Besides, the Czech Republic turned out to be surprisingly attractive for many other members of the Obama administration. Prague is the only regional capital visited twice by Obama himself, an honour unknown for Bratislava or Budapest. Warsaw hosted the U.S. President at that time too, but only once. The Czech Republic is also, along with Poland, the only Central European country to have been visited by both Hillary Clinton and Vice-President Biden. These moves were reciprocated by the Czech Foreign Minister, and by Prime Minister Petr Nečas, who in October 2011 met with Obama in Washington, becoming the second Czech official, after Václav Havel, to stay at Blair House, the official residence for foreign leaders.

**Hungary: In the Eye of the Storm**

Although it was the Czech Republic that, ahead of all other V4 members, shared the most interests with the U.S. between 2009 and 2013, it was Hungary

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21 In October 2012 there was 516 Czech personnel in Afghanistan.
that got by far the most attention from Washington. In fact, this period may be seen as the most turbulent in Hungarian–American relations since 1989.

The reason was deep U.S. concerns regarding the domestic transformations made by Viktor Orbán’s conservative government since spring 2010. The Obama administration openly presented a very critical approach towards Orbán’s reforms including the controversial new constitution, media law and central bank law, which increased the country’s centralisation as well as power of Fidesz, Orbán’s ruling party, cementing its position with a two-thirds majority received in the 2010 parliamentary elections. Washington did not hesitate to voice its doubts that recent political changes may threaten democracy. For instance, in Budapest in June 2011, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, standing next to visibly unsettled Orbán, remarked that America—as a friend of Hungary—“expressed its concerns and particularly called for a real commitment to the independence of the judiciary, a free press, and governmental transparency, because it is important not only for Hungarians that this great democratic journey … we continue to exemplify democratic values and freedoms.”

One month later, a critical report on the recent developments in Hungary was prepared by Thomas O. Melia, a Deputy Head of the Democracy and Human Rights Office in the Department of State. The U.S. Ambassador in Hungary played active role in the dispute, too.

These was framed in soft, diplomatic language, but the United States’ interest was very often seen in Hungary as interference in the country’s internal affairs. Right-wing media even suggested U.S. support for the left-wing opposition, a fact which, although unlikely to be true, further soured the relationship

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24 Eleni Tsakopolulos Kounalakis between August and December 2011 published two articles in Hungarian press in which she once again raised concerns on domestic transformations made by Orbán government (“Értékalapú szövetség,” Magyar Nemzet, 3 August 2011, p. 6, and “Alaposan megfontolni,” Heti Válasz, 8 December 2011, p. 8). Moreover, in August she was obliged to meet with the Hungarian Prime Minister but the meeting was postponed for the period of three months. See: P. Tamási, “Leba,” Magyar Narancs, http://magyarnarancs.hu/belpol/leba-77383.
between the two sides. Symbolically, Orbán visited the U.S. only once during his tenure—in May 2012, to attend the NATO Summit in Chicago and without scheduling a meeting with Obama. At the time, however, he paid many visits to Beijing and other eastern capitals, which also shows the significant shift in Hungary’s foreign policy at the time.

We cannot be fully certain why the U.S. decided to involve itself so much in the dialogue with Budapest, but nevertheless the question about the reasons for Washington position should be asked, especially given the United States’ general attitude of limiting its influence in Central Europe. Firstly, it seems that people such as Philip H. Gordon and Thomas O. Melia, influential officials in Clinton’s Department of State, were with their democratic background simply sensitive about these issues. Clinton’s circle also include a number of informal, low-key advisors with a very critical approach towards Orbán, including Charles Gati, a Hungarian-born American scholar, and author of an inflammatory article on five methods of overthrowing Hungary’s current government. This, coupled with the very dark picture of Orbán’s reforms painted by the American media, as well as a lack of significant pro-governmental lobbyists in Washington, contributed to the U.S. reaction.

Moreover, it was significant that Budapest already had a very bumpy relationship with both the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund, where the U.S. enjoys some influences. The sharpening American rhetoric coincided with EU interventions, which only indicated that Washington and Brussels shared a similar view on the domestic changes of Fidesz, and sought to

25 Right-wing media in Hungary suggested that the U.S. government is preparing Gordon Bajnai, the former Prime Minister of the technical government, to replace Orbán at the position of the PM. Bajnai in 2011 spend few months in the U.S., teaching at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.


pursue compatible policies towards Hungary. Especially since the country proved its inefficiency in dealing with the deepening economic problems, this dialogue has become even more unequal and provoked Washington to use it to pragmatically strengthen its own image as an active and operative player in Europe.

In fact, the political developments in Hungary almost completely dominated the bilateral contacts, although in the spheres of strategic security, Hungary did its best to keep the ties and fulfill the existing allied obligations to NATO. Here the country—given its rather moderate geopolitical potential—gave quite successful performance in 2009–2013.

Although, as reported by Wiki Leaks, Hungarian activity in Afghanistan sometimes met with a critical response from U.S. diplomats,\(^{29}\) it is also true that Budapest made an effort to confirm its loyalty there. After winning the election, Orbán upheld the decision of his predecessor to send an additional 200 troops and said that the country will stay in Afghanistan until 2014.\(^{30}\) The greatest Hungarian military presence was in the city of Pul-e Khumri, the capital of Baghlan Province, dominated by pro-American Tajiks. That is why Hungarian activity there was limited mostly to defensive, training and organisational duties.

The second important field of cooperation between the U.S. and Central Europe are the Western Balkans, an area which plays a strategic role in Hungary’s foreign policy.\(^{31}\) In the 1990s, during the intervention in Bosnia/Herzegovina and Kosovo, Budapest allowed the NATO forces to use its air space as well as the Taszar air base. Hungary under Orbán continued to treat this area as a priority, keeping in Kosovo around 200–300 troops in the NATO/KFOR mission. Additionally, in June, NATO entrusted Hungary to take charge of Kosovo’s airspace for civilian traffic when it reopens in 2013.\(^{32}\) It was, indeed,


a major diplomatic success for the country, which only strengthens its position in the Balkans and gives it a chance to reinforce cooperation with the Americans.

The high point in the turbulent relationship between Hungary and the U.S. was Hungary’s diplomatic work during the Libyan conflict. Hungarian officials participated in humanitarian aid for the refugees stuck at Tunisia’s borders with Libya. However, the biggest contribution of the country was that Hungary’s embassy in Tripoli was among two European embassies that continued to serve during the whole conflict, becoming the representative of the U.S. and some 50 more countries. Thanks to the efforts of Ambassador Bela Marton and other Hungarian diplomats in May 2011, four foreign journalists, including two Americans, were released from the Libyan prisons. Hungarian Foreign Minister János Martonyi, received a formal letter of gratitude from his American counterpart, Hillary Clinton, for Hungary’s diplomatic activity during the military operation in Libya.33

This, however, does not change the rather negative picture of relations between Hungary and the U.S. between 2009 and 2013. It seems that, by entering into bilateral contacts, previously unknown tensions and misunderstandings have seriously strained each nation’s confidence in the other.

**Slovakia: Too Small, Too Distant, Too Sceptical**

In the period 2009–2013, the pragmatic Obama administration made it clear that Slovakia—a country 0.5% the size of the United States, with limited power in the EU and with no natural resources—had too little geopolitical weight to attract Washington’s attention. It was actually the only V4 state visited by neither Obama nor Secretary of State Clinton, or by Vice-President Biden. When it was revealed that Obama was to sign the nuclear arms reduction pact on a neutral ground with his Russian counterpart, Bratislava, which successfully hosted a similar meeting between Bush and Putin in 2005, was tipped as the venue of choice. But, surprisingly, it was Prague that held that honour, in spite of the fact that Obama had already been there exactly one year earlier. The Slovaks were also dissatisfied by Biden’s Central European tour in autumn 2009, which included Slovakia’s neighbours—Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as Romania, but not Slovakia itself.34

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However, it is not only U.S. neo-pragmatism that drove Washington to keep Slovakia on the margins. Between 2006 and 2010 the ruling left-wing SMER-Socialna Demokracia party brought new perspectives to the Slovak foreign and security policy, suggesting a certain separation from the U.S. and more attention to the EU and Russia.\(^{35}\) In fact, for the Americans, who seemed used to the fact that Central Europe was—despite political developments—rather pro-American due to its historical experiences, it was probably slightly shocking to hear that small Slovakia not only lacked enthusiastic support the U.S. military presence in Europe, but also openly criticised its regional partners who decided to join the Missile Defence System initiative.\(^{36}\) But Robert Fico, Slovakia’s charismatic Prime Minister and SMER leader, only consequently continued with his old rhetoric: at the time of Obama’s predecessor, he was among very few Central European leaders, who from the very beginning opposed a military solution to the Iraq crisis.

Meanwhile Slovak society also turned its back on the U.S. It is true that Central and Eastern Europe’s scepticism about Obama still distinguishes this region from the Western part of the continent. The first time it could be observed was in the George W. Bush era when the President had low standing and popularity across the West, whereas the East came to value him for his strict policy in Iraq and Afghanistan, for backing western integration for Georgia and Ukraine, and later for the Missile Defence System partnership. Obama inherited this division. Nonetheless, Slovak scepticism towards Obama stood out compared to other Central European nations. In 2012, only 55% of Slovaks declared their approval of the President’s handling of international policies, while in 2009 it was 71%. Only Poles, Bulgarians, Turks and Russians gave him lower support. At the same time, Slovaks turned out to be by far the most lukewarm nation regarding strengthening the U.S.—EU Partnership in Security and Diplomatic Affairs (19%).\(^{37}\)

Politically, things changed slightly in June 2010, when Fico unexpectedly lost power. The new centre-right government, headed by Iveta Radičová, declared that transatlantic contacts would be rebuilt. Radičová herself went to

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Washington in September 2011 for the UN Assembly and Open Government Meeting, and had a special meeting with Obama, too. Interestingly, one year before that, she was honoured as a Glamour magazine “Woman of the Year” at a ceremony in Carnegie Hall in New York.\textsuperscript{38} However, these were rather prestigious gestures with no real impact on the country’s foreign policy from a four-party government that was too politically weak to make long-term changes. In November 2011, the Radičová government collapsed after losing a vote of confidence in parliament, which was combined with the vote on the ratification of changes to the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF).\textsuperscript{39}

One of the first Fico government’s latest decisions was to increase the number of Slovak soldiers in Afghanistan, from 244 to around 400.\textsuperscript{40} This was accepted also by Radičová, and was an unexpected move at a time when many NATO members favoured withdrawing their units. That is probably why NATO remains the most important field of cooperation between Slovakia and the United States. It is no coincidence that, in the government’s 2011 foreign policy programme, the short chapter on bilateral relations with the U.S. was followed by one on relations with NATO, mostly focused on “the U.S.–EU friendship” as well as on cooperation in promoting stability around the world.\textsuperscript{41} What may facilitate the relations of the two within NATO, is the fact that the position of the Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was in November 2011 taken by experienced Slovak diplomat, Jan Kubiš.\textsuperscript{42}

The U.S. also has some economic interests in Slovakia, for instance the U.S. Steel Corporation owns a steel company located in Košice. However, it is still insufficient; the American foreign direct investments in Slovakia are smaller than in the Czech Republic or Hungary. This, coupled with the moderate political weight of the country and sceptical social attitudes, gives Slovakia a rather marginal place in the U.S. approach to Central Europe.

\textsuperscript{38}“Podľa časopisu Glamour je Iveta Radičová ženou roka,” SME.sk, 4 October 2010, www.sme.sk.


\textsuperscript{40}“Slovakia Will Send More Troops to Afghanistan,” Slovak Spectator, 28 January 2010, spectator.sme.sk.

\textsuperscript{41}Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí a európskych záležitostí Slovenskej Republiky, Zameranie zahraničnej politiky Slovenskej republiky na rok 2011, www.mzv.sk.

\textsuperscript{42}“Kubiš sa stal osobitným vyslancom OSN pre Afganistan,” SME.sk, 28 November 2011, www.sme.sk.
Any Chance for the U.S.—Visegrad Partnership? Yes, but…

The dominant topic of the Central Europe–U.S. Summit, which took place in 2011 in Warsaw, was the region’s support for the Arab democracies after the Arab Spring. It shows the direction of future cooperation between the U.S. and Central Europe as seen in Washington. The Americans expect their partners to have a wider outlook concerning global issues. This is in fact something that all of the Central European countries cannot fully understand, due either to strong doubts on the quality of American leadership in the world, or simply to feeling too weak to participate in global developments, that is further exacerbated by the weak economic performances of many of them.

It is rather unlikely that U.S. strategy will change in the short or medium term. Whether Central Europe wants it or not, for Americans the region has already lost its unique and extraordinary geopolitical meaning, which drove U.S. foreign policy in the 1980s and 1990s. In the long run, though, this may prove risky. If the unstable 20th century has taught us anything, it is that the inflammatory potential of Central Europe is quite high, and that, left to its own devices, the region may get out of any control. Three of the most important influences on global reshuffles—1914, 1939 and 1989—began in Central Europe. In all of these, the U.S. was forced to act as a firefighter, albeit one who puts out fires after a delay. After the First World War, Wilson’s idealism brought freedom to the region, but at the expense of stability. Fifteen years later, Franklin Delano Roosevelt pragmatically sacrificed freedom, but won stability. In 1989, though, the U.S. finally received both freedom and stability. And since then Washington has become more and more convinced that its engagement in Central Europe is no longer needed. This, though, may be a false belief.

But it is not only the U.S. position that influences the transatlantic relations. Certainly, Central Europe is not prepared to fulfill American expectations of becoming more world-oriented. Neither does it have the tools to do that. However, for the Visegrad Group, which seems to share both the most unified political identity among all the countries of the region and a long and quite fruitful tradition of cooperation, this could be a chance to transform itself gradually into an organisation with more political weight. Therefore, instead of waiting for a dramatic shift in U.S. strategy, it would be beneficial for the V4 nations to start changing themselves.

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The first Obama tenure, of 2009–2013, showed that, for Americans, the Visegrad Group simply does not exist. Instead, there are only individual states and their problems. This “hangover moment” turned out to be advantageous for none of the V4 members. The strategic importance of the Czech Republic was stripped dramatically additionally process cemented by a few unpleasant signs of diplomatic disrespect. Hungarians needed to struggle with accusations of an assault on democracy. The domination of bilateralism left Slovaks completely marginalised. The V4 efforts should be, therefore, directed towards creating greater significance and influence for the region, which should start behaving as a group rather than as frustrated individuals, and like a partner of the United States, not as a complainer or troublemaker.

It may therefore be desirable for the V4 countries to supplement the usual east-west line of their foreign policies with a new north-south perspective. Geopolitical changes in the last few years, which include the Arab Spring, the intensification of the EU integration process in the Western Balkans, the emergence of new energy routes and the rising power of Turkey, suggest that greater attention will be paid to the central-southern part of the continent, which nowadays is much more likely to seek rapprochement with the EU than are many of the eastern neighbours. To the north, too, economic growth in the Scandinavian states and recovery in the Baltic states only adds to the interest created by transport and energy developments in the Arctic.

The V4 should still be identified as a supporter of democracy in the east, but it may also try to extend its democratic agenda to the Maghreb. Just after the Arab Spring, many believed that the region, with its know-how from the time of political and economic reforms in the switch from communism to democracy, could offer lessons in change to the Arab partners. These expectations, though, were unfulfilled. It seems wise to use the Visegrad International Fund, which may start providing for grants for people from North Africa, to help this process along.

Security issues play a role too. The V4 has made a flagship project of the North–South Gas Corridor, developing gas transport interconnections between the liquefied natural gas terminal in Świnoujście in Poland and the Croatian island of Krk. If completed, the corridor may result in a geopolitical breakthrough in the region, facilitating a diversification of energy sources and full protection of gas supplies for all states now dependent on Russia, thus building a quite new political and geo-economic identity for Central Europe. America should widely show the V4 efforts to develop energy self-sufficiency
by providing expertise, such as in terms of shale oil, and by working on maximising what it can get from the EU for infrastructure development.\textsuperscript{44}

Moreover, the V4 should commit to more joint military efforts within NATO. As Tomas Valasek stated accurately: “The Central Europeans have gone from being model allies, spending two per cent of GDP on defence, to being some of the stingiest NATO countries. … Washington monitors closely the allies’ defence spending and their contributions to Afghanistan, and nothing would be more toxic to Central Europe’s influence in the United States than a reputation as “free-loaders.”\textsuperscript{45} Hence, once the crisis is over, the V4 members should increase military spending, but should seek to strengthen military cooperation with the regional partners too. It is recommended to set out the rational plan of using the common Visegrad Battlegroup, the military unit which will have about 3,000 soldiers from all V4 countries and should be fully deployable in 2016.\textsuperscript{46}

Of course, it may sound idealistic, or indeed presumptuous, for new EU members to aspire to more important geopolitical role. However, with its geopolitical potential, increasingly strong position within the EU, and huge international ambitions, the rewards for Poland could be great. The Czech Republic and Slovakia, like Poland, are emerging well from the financial crisis which, when coupled with the interest of rising powers such as China, may result in rapid growth in the economic attractiveness of the whole region. Together with Hungary, the Visegrad Four may become the heart of a new axis. And the stronger it is as a group, the stronger its relationship with the U.S. will become.

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The Development Cooperation Policies of Visegrad Countries
—An Unrealised Potential

Introduction

In the last decade, Visegrad countries (V4) have emerged as new donors of official development assistance (ODA). While making important progress nationally they never considered development cooperation as an important area for joint initiatives, leaving significant potential untapped. This paper looks closer at the V4 countries’ development policies and analyses major similarities between them. It tries to answer three basic questions: whether V4 countries share any common points in development cooperation; what stopped them thus far from exploring more opportunities for cooperation; and where the most potential lies for joint action in the future.

The article starts with a brief description of the development cooperation systems of the four Visegrad countries. It then moves on to a detailed description of the crucial similarities between them in the next chapter, underlining common interests and challenges. Subsequently, main obstacles and constrains are analysed. Finally, special attention is paid to the Eastern Partnership as the most promising area for joint V4 projects. The article concludes with the argument that development cooperation has the potential to become a transformative experience that can give a practical dimension to V4 synergies in international affairs.

Development Cooperation of V4 Countries

Although V4 countries are sometimes referred to as “re-emerging” donors, due to their activities during the Cold War, their modern development cooperation systems were not launched until the late 1990s in preparation for EU accession and the implementation of *acquis communautaire*. As development cooperation was already regarded as an important element of the EU’s external

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relations, new member states were expected to prepare for providing aid in line with EU standards and principles. The first strategic documents regulating the development cooperation of V4 countries were adopted in Hungary in 2001. The Czech Republic followed suit in 2002, and Poland and Slovakia in 2003. Development cooperation was a serious challenge for all four countries because they faced financial constraints at home and knew relatively little about developing countries. They also had a limited presence there and had minimal experience in managing and implementing aid programmes. Still, the level of financing for development cooperation has increased many folds in the last decade, especially since the V4 countries’ EU entry in 2004 (see Table 1). Nevertheless, in 2011, the V4 countries spent between 0.08% and 0.13% of their GNI on Official Development Assistance (ODA), one of the lowest figures in the European Union.

Table 1
V4 donors’ net ODA disbursements 1999–2011, current prices; $million

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bilateral ODA</strong></td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>14.94</td>
<td>31.31</td>
<td>80.36</td>
<td>63.58</td>
<td>64.42</td>
<td>77.70</td>
<td>80.95</td>
<td>117.14</td>
<td>101.02</td>
<td>79.36</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8.16</td>
<td>9.80</td>
<td>11.55</td>
<td>14.12</td>
<td>10.19</td>
<td>44.70</td>
<td>70.73</td>
<td>83.17</td>
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<td>132.07</td>
<td>113.68</td>
<td>148.20</td>
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<td>90.55</td>
<td>113.51</td>
<td>144.70</td>
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<td>214.70</td>
<td>227.56</td>
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<tr>
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<td>70.44</td>
<td>91.49</td>
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<td>106.86</td>
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<td>100.37</td>
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<td>106.94</td>
<td>116.92</td>
<td>114.34</td>
<td>140.06</td>
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<td><strong>ODA/GNI ratio</strong></td>
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<td>117.51</td>
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<td><strong>ODA/GNI ratio</strong></td>
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In the last ten years V4 countries have made substantial progress in constructing national development systems and providing aid in a more mature and professional manner. All V4 countries except Hungary adopted special development cooperation laws and multiannual strategies explaining major aims, principles and priorities for foreign aid. The Czech Republic has already prepared country strategy papers (CSP) for its priority partners and Slovakia is working on its first CSP; Poland and Hungary may consider following suit in the future. All four countries assigned development policy to their respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs, where special development departments were created to deal with this issue. While the Czech Republic and Slovakia established separate implementing agencies to carry out aid programmes, Hungary and

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4 Slovak Republic adopted *Official Development Aid Law* in 2007 and has *Mid-term Strategy of Development Aid for Years 2009–2013*; Czech Republic has *Act on Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid* in place since 2010 and *Development Cooperation Strategy of the Czech Republic 2010–2017*, Poland adopted *Development Cooperation Act* in 2011 and *Midannual Programme of Polish Development Cooperation 2012–2015* was approved just in March 2012. Hungary is believed to start working on *Resolution by the Parliament on Development Cooperation* in 2011 and more strategic documents are expected.

Poland have quasi-agencies dealing with a part of bilateral assistance.\(^6\) Although some countries (the Czech Republic and Poland) made an effort to strengthen the leading role of the MFA in managing overall development policy, their systems are still fragmented, with several line ministries responsible for distributing ODA in specific areas (i.e. Ministry of Finance—financial aid, Ministry of Education—scholarships, etc.) and there are still major problems with coordination and coherence of development policies. Furthermore, the V4 development cooperation models are centralised, with major responsibilities resting with the headquarters and only a limited role played by the embassies. Although there are still important differences between V4 countries, with the Czech Republic being the most advanced and Hungary lagging behind, it is possible to draw a number of similarities.

**Convergences and Commonalities**

The similar historical context and EU membership set the same environment for V4 development cooperation policies. A look at how these systems have functioned in recent years reveals a number of important similarities. These can be summarised in seven major points:

1. **Limited “internalisation.”** The modern development policies of the V4 countries have external origins, as they evolved from foreign pressure and were not a domestically grown phenomenon. This fact can indeed explain many of the shortcomings of the V4 countries in this area, as these countries were not ready yet, nor did they have the political will to provide foreign assistance at that early stage. In this sense, some of the V4 countries were rather “premature donors” than “re-emerging ones.”\(^7\) At the same time, V4 countries proved to be more resilient to external influences after their EU accession in 2004. As a number of studies have shown, even though integration with the EU played a crucial role in

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6 Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) was established in 2007; Czech Development Agency has been operating since 2008 and was re-established under the new law again in 2010; in Hungary HUN-IDA, a non-profit private company, was responsible for implementation of aid projects since 2004 however its current status is unclear; in Poland new law of 2011 established public foundation: International Solidarity Fund “Knowing How” since 2012 January as a premier implementing and re-granting agency in the priority field of democracy support.

7 B. Szent-Iványi, *International Development Cooperation in Hungary: A Ten Year Perspective*, prepared for the workshop “EU-12 development policies at half-time: Europeanization, specialization, or both?” at Palacky University, Olomouc, Czech Republic, 15–17 February 2012.
restoring V4 foreign aid programmes, deeper “Europeisation” of their development policies, in the sense of adopting EU objectives, rules and policies, has been rather limited.\(^8\)

Instead of simply embracing best practices and established norms developed by Western donors over the decades of South-North cooperation, V4 countries advanced their distinctive approach to development cooperation—chiefly because of their more limited resources or deliberate political choices. According to one Hungarian diplomat national “interests dictate a different type of international development policy than the one advocated by the EU.” This observation seems fitting for all V4 countries.\(^9\) At the same time, the emergence of a dissimilar model of development cooperation in Europe signalled “limitations of the EU as a standard setter.”\(^10\) This is reflected today in the different geographical and thematic priorities of V4 countries and loose application of international standards of aid effectiveness.

Despite certain commitments made at the EU and global forums, being signatories to all fundamental documents in the area, from the Millennium Declaration, through the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, to the Busan Partnership for effective development cooperation, V4 countries have paid little attention to their own pledges. Even though they vow to align with international standards in their strategic documents, this finds little evidence in their actions. For example, they all failed to direct 0.17% of their GNI for ODA in 2010 and no V4 country is planning to attain the 0.33% level by 2015. None of them spends 50% of increased ODA after 2005 to countries in Africa and none plans to channel 0.20% of the ODA for the least developed countries (LDC) in 2015. Unlike older EU donors, V4 countries concentrate their aid on Middle Income Countries from Eastern and Southern Europe rather than on the least developed countries from Africa, and consider democratization and support for civil society rather than eradication of poverty as the main objective of development cooperation.

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While the prospect of the Czech presidency of the EU Council in 2009, followed by the Hungarian and Polish presidencies in 2011, served as the latest encouragement to strengthen the V4 development cooperation policies in line with EU guidelines, the lack of similar opportunities in the future poses a risk that development cooperation will be further downgraded in these countries’ external relations, or moved further apart from international good practices. The fact that no V4 country seems willing any more to join the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (DAC-OECD) soon means they will be less obliged to adhere to international standards in this area. The reinvigoration of regional cooperation on development issues could then serve to stimulate improvements and uphold the important status of this cooperation in foreign policies.

2. Common added value. All Visegrad countries share the same comparative advantage in the sense that they seek their area of expertise in successful economic and political transition and in integration with the EU. This specialisation was appraised at the time of accession by European institutions, experts, and even NGOs, which saw this as “an opportunity to mainstream” aid to the poorest citizens in Eastern Europe and Central Asia within the “existing EU governmental and nongovernmental strategies.” The EU strategy on development cooperation adopted in 2005, just after the first round of enlargement, acknowledged that “the EU will capitalise on the new Member States’ experience (such as transition management) and help strengthen the role of these countries as new donors.” In 2010 the EU prepared the European Transition Compendium to build on the NMS experience in the area, which was recently translated into an online database on best practices in transformation (www.eutransition.eu). However, as one recent study on the participation of NMS actors in EU-funded projects focusing on “transition experience” shows in practice the EU does not yet make sufficient use of the NMS expertise in this area. 


13 B. Szent-Iványi, “The EU’s Support for Democratic Governance in the Eastern Neighborhood: The Role of Transition Experience from the New Member States,” forthcoming publication.
3. Related priorities. The geographical and thematic priorities of the V4 countries development policies are convergent. The list of their partner countries shows that V4 countries attach much more attention to European nations than distant developing states (Table 2). All V4 countries consider Moldova and Afghanistan as priority partners; different combinations of three of them are present in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, Georgia and the Palestinian Administered Territories, and two of them share an interest in supporting reforms in at least the same two countries.

Table 2

Geographic and thematic priorities of development cooperation for V4 members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner countries</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
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<td>1. Bosnia and Herzegovina</td>
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<td>9. Laos</td>
<td>15. Iraq</td>
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<td>10. Mongolia</td>
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<td>11. Montenegro</td>
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<td>12. Ukraine</td>
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<td>13. Yemen</td>
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<td>14. Afghanistan</td>
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<td>Phase-out countries</td>
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Aid disbursements in the last three years confirm that Europe receives the largest share of V4 bilateral aid on average, even though some sporadic debt cancellations distort the overall picture. One genuine exception is Afghanistan, where Hungary and the Czech Republic run Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and Poland works through the American PRT, and thus all three have provided substantial funds in recent years.

Table 3

Net ODA disbursements to major regions from V4 countries—on average, 2007–2009 ($ million / %)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region Name</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disbursement $ (%)</td>
<td>Region Name</td>
<td>Disbursement $ (%)</td>
<td>Region Name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South and Central Asia</td>
<td>23.91 (36.9%)</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>8.23 (34.3%)</td>
<td>Other Asia and Oceania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>21.09 (24.5%)</td>
<td>South and Central Asia</td>
<td>6.70 (27.9%)</td>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
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</table>
In terms of thematic concentration, similarities between V4 countries, evolving from their shared comparative advantage, are even more vivid (see Table 2). While many sectors are considered priority areas by V4 countries, the top priority is support for democracy, human rights and civil society. Although Poland is the most explicit in considering democracy promotion as the most important aim of development cooperation, all V4 countries share a belief, based on their own history, that sustainable growth is only possible in a stable democratic environment. This was further reinforced in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2011 when V4 countries offered their help to northern African states undergoing democratic transformation. For instance, Slovakia established a special unit within the MFA—a Centre for the Transfer of Experiences from Integration and Reforms (CETIR) to share its expertise. Slovakia also included Tunisia and Egypt as partner countries in its 2012 annual programme of foreign assistance. Poland, in turn, extended technical assistance to Tunisia and Libya in 2011 and recognised them as priority countries in its multiannual programme adopted in March 2012.14

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4. **Instrumentalisation of aid.** The development policy of the Visegrad countries is considered highly politicised and donor-driven.\(^{15}\) This means that this policy is employed as a political tool to enhance the donors’ political and economic interests rather than serve the development needs of partner countries. As observed by one scholar, in a majority of NMS, “ODA is considered as an important policy instrument for maintaining regional stability.” This is further emphasised by these countries’ desire to share their transition and EU accession expertise with neighbouring countries lagging behind in these processes.\(^{16}\) Recent analysis of aid allocation shows that “the Visegrad donors seem to behave in a similar fashion to the donors that the literature has labelled ‘egoistic’ … they mainly support recipients in which they have political, security and economic interests,” and “the reduction of global poverty is clearly not a consideration.”\(^{17}\) For instance, “the Czech Republic makes no secret of supporting commercial connection of Czech ODA activities;”\(^{18}\) the main rationale behind Hungary’s aid was to support Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries;\(^{19}\) and Poland officially admits to using aid to enhance political transformation in Eastern Europe.

5. **Common challenges.** V4 countries share similar challenges concerning the quantity and quality of aid. After significant increases in aid budgets in the

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16 M. Bucar, M. Mrak, “Challenges of Development Cooperation for EU New Member State”, *op. cit.*, p. 5.


first several years, the levels of ODA in V4 countries have remained stagnant in the last few years. The combined gap of the Visegrad group between actual spending on development and commitments in 2010 was €485 million and will reach almost €1.9 billion in 2015, according to EU estimates.\(^{20}\) Although all V4 countries were among the EU members who increased their ODA levels in 2011 (the Czech Republic by 4.2%, Hungary by 16.2%, Poland by 5.6%, and Slovakia by 10.1%) despite the crisis,\(^{21}\) this was possible only because it was the first year when they started contributing to the European Development Fund. Increased payments to the EU budget and the EDF in the coming years will further increase the unfavourable ratio of bilateral to multilateral aid. In contrast to more mature donors, who spend three-quarters of their development assistance bilaterally on average, V4 countries channelled independently only a quarter of their aid, clearly disclosing their weaker capabilities in this area. This trend is even more likely as V4 countries used to count debt cancellations among bilateral ODA; the availability of debt cancellations will decrease in the future.

The substantial share of V4 ODA (between 8% for Slovakia and 18% for Hungary) is composed of “inflated aid” in the form of debt cancellations, tied aid, scholarships for students and help for refugees.\(^{22}\) All V4 countries reluctantly use new modes of development cooperation such as budget support and sectoral support. Instead they chiefly apply project aid executed by national NGOs and private firms and other actors. They hardly implement aid effectiveness standards (ownership, managing for results, alignment, partnership). Moreover, especially Poland and Hungary have serious problems with proper reporting and statistics of development aid, transparency of activities and evaluation of projects.\(^{23}\) All this shows that all V4 countries still have much to do in order to improve the effectiveness of development cooperation.

6. Low priority. Partly because of its external nature, development cooperation has been regarded as a low priority on the political agenda. It was never considered important by politicians, media and society at large.


\(^{21}\) OECD, Development: Aid to Developing Countries Falls because of Global Recession, 4 April 2012, www.oecd.org.


Development cooperation is hardly to be found in the programmes of political parties, debates in national parliaments, or political discourse across the region. Although surveys conducted in V4 countries by the EU show strong public support for “helping poorer countries,” about as strong as in “older” EU members, the public has a low level of awareness about what development cooperation is all about (Table 4).  

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Czech Republic</th>
<th>Hungary</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>EU average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>It is important to support people in developing countries (very important/relatively important)</td>
<td>83% (24%/59%)</td>
<td>75% (20%/55%)</td>
<td>93% (32%, 60%)</td>
<td>84% (29%/55%)</td>
<td>85% (36%/49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Three the most preferred destinations of development aid</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa—59%; The Middle East and North Africa—49%</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa—51%; The Indian Subcontinent—30%</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa—62%; The Middle East and North Africa—38%; non-EU areas of Eastern Europe—20%</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa—62%; The Middle East and North Africa—44%;</td>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa—70%; The Middle East and North Africa—33%;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Personal engagement in helping poorer countries (as a volunteer in organisations or giving money to organisations)</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Two biggest challenges confronting developing countries</td>
<td>Poverty—48%, Economic crisis—33%</td>
<td>Poverty—52%, Economic crisis—43%</td>
<td>Economic crisis—42%; Poverty—36%</td>
<td>Poverty—52%, Economic crisis—37%</td>
<td>Poverty—42%, economic crisis—36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

24 It was observed in 2011 Special Eurobarometer that the initial divide between “new” and “older” Member States in attitude to development cooperation “was already fading away in spring 2009 and is now nearly non-existent: the overall support is at 90% in EU15 and 89% in NMS12 and the only detectable divide is in the intensity of support (47% very important in EU15 against 40% in NMS12),” see: European Commision, Making a Difference in the World: Europeans and the Future of Development Aid, Special Eurobarometer, November 2011.
Citizens in V4 countries often confuse development cooperation with humanitarian assistance, and many have not heard about the Millennium Development Goals. They are also less likely than Western Europeans to become personally involved in development cooperation and often consider their own countries much poorer than in reality. Moreover, they expect to receive rather than disburse aid. All this shows that their support for foreign aid may in fact be shallow and weak.25 Had it not been for the work of several nongovernmental development organisations, individual journalists and academics in these countries, the subject of development cooperation would be virtually non-existent in public life.

What these surveys also show is that the views of governments and people on development cooperation in V4 countries largely and clearly diverge. While a strong majority in the region would prefer to help Sub-Saharan Africa, this region of the world receives the smallest amounts of ODA from V4 countries (see Table 4). Similarly, despite the official policy, which prioritises support for democracy and good governance, people in V4 countries consider poverty as the most important challenge facing developing countries, with good governance ranked among the least important priorities. This again points to low interest and weak public pressure on V4 governments, which allows them to ignore the voice of the people on development issues.

The misunderstandings and low importance attached to development cooperation by both the public and the political class may have been a key

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reason why the Visegrad governments have been rather slow and reluctant to strengthen this policy at a time when so many other crucial issues where waiting to be solved. The need to re-evaluate the role of development policy within the broader context of external relations and secure more understanding for activities in this area remains a serious challenge for all V4 countries. Although some improvements have been made in this area in recent years, as governments started to rediscover foreign aid as a useful foreign policy tool and introduced elements of global education to school curricula, much more still needs to be done.

7. Lack of cooperation. One last thing V4 countries have in common is that they do not cooperate among themselves in development cooperation. Even though they have some experience in trilateral or multilateral cooperation with other partners (for instance Slovakia used to cooperate with Austria, the Czech Republic is facilitating EU aid in two countries: Moldova and Mongolia), they rarely explored these opportunities within the Group. This is despite some efforts undertaken to strengthen V4 cooperation in this area. For example in 2008, Poland, while holding the presidency of the V4, called for “closer coordination of assistance undertakings, particularly those of a technical character, addressed to states in the V4 neighbourhood, i.e. Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and the Caucasus.”26 The call produced little effect. Instead of a conference in Warsaw in October 2008 focusing on the assistance activities of V4 countries, four rounds of meetings of experts and institutions were held with limited practical results.27 It was not until 2011 that V4 countries carried out their first small joint project to support the ministry of foreign affairs in Moldova, discussed a new joint project for Kenya, and prioritised development cooperation for the Eastern Partnership (more below).

Competition or Cooperation

Despite many similarities and shared interests in development cooperation, V4 countries more often seem to compete rather than cooperate with each other in the field.28 A major problem hindering cooperation is indirect rivalry and

structural differences between members in the broad sense. As observed by one analyst, this is a “traditional structural” weakness of the VG—Poland’s size and its longstanding self-perception as a regional power what prompt other Visegrad countries to “harbour suspicions about a Polish tendency to see the VG not as a collective exercise but rather as a vehicle for Poland to ‘amplify’ its own preferences and also as a ‘forum of last resort’.”

Moreover, the V4 group suffers from a tendency to act independently outside the group and “a kind of leadership competition within the VG, particularly between the Czechs and the Poles.”

This means that, without improving trust and building up confidence among V4 members, any progress in development cooperation area may be hard to achieve. At the same time, it can be argued that development cooperation itself—as a soft area of international relations—may serve to test V4 initiatives and build up confidence. Any successful and visible project in foreign assistance to third countries will surely improve the atmosphere for cooperation in other sectors and prove that acting together V4 countries may do more good than going it alone.

Another challenge V4 members are facing is politicisation of development cooperation. The instrumentalisation of development policy, though understandable for many reasons, is in fact a double-edged sword. When giving aid is employed mainly for the attainment of donor’s commercial benefits in a recipient country, and used to leverage one’s own political influences or improve national visibility, then naturally cooperation with other donors is less likely. Not surprisingly, countries that use this pragmatic approach to development are reluctant to engage in multilateral arrangements unless they have no other options to operate in a given country. In this context, improving development cooperation between V4 countries would require striking a balance between pursuing one’s own national interests and serving the development needs of a beneficiary country. Leaders in all four countries would need to agree on a list of selected countries, sectors or specific programmes in which they could restrict their national agendas for the sake of strengthening the V4 brand in the international arena and working for the genuine interest of aid recipients.

Thirdly, it can be said that a number of objective and technical factors played a role in reducing feasibility for joint V4 initiatives in this area. Limited human

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30 Ibidem.
and financial resources and the low priority of development cooperation are the most important ones. The development departments in the foreign ministries of V4 countries were usually small and understaffed, striving to deal with daily responsibilities rather than searching for new regional initiatives. The limited financial budgets for development cooperation, hardly sufficient for domestic partners, made it difficult to look for additional channels for multilateral aid allocations. The low priority attached to the subject and the scarcity of experts in V4 countries, who could arguably present the benefits of a regional approach, positioned development cooperation as the least important issue at V4 meetings. Not surprisingly, dialogue on development cooperation was pursued more often among activists and NGOs, especially when they succeeded in securing grants from EU sources or the International Visegrad Fund. It is possible to assume that there will be more room for cooperation once the internal capacities of V4 members are strengthened and the role of bilateral assistance increases. To speed up the process and stimulate new ideas in this area, governments could increase the share of the International Visegrad Fund budget dedicated for development cooperation and for enhancing cooperation between NGOs from the four countries.

The fourth question to be raised in this context is whether V4 countries have correctly identified and understood their comparative advantage. Although the V4 countries’ experience in transition is unquestionable, it is much harder to say what this experience really consists of. A decision to specialise in this area was often taken a priori and was based on general intuition and on the historic, geographical and economic links of the donors. It thus lacked operationalisation and its substance was difficult to grasp. V4 countries did not start launching professional programmes and institutions tasked with sharing these experiences until two or three years ago. Still, it seems that V4 countries do not fully understand their own transformations and more studies on this subject are needed. When a thorough awareness of one’s strong and weak points is lacking and specialisation is defined too broadly, it may be difficult to find complementarities and dedicate separate tasks to different donors. In fact, it seems that the quite unique transformation paths in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Hungary could add up to a set of best practices adapted to different needs, and prove more complementarities. Thus, to facilitate more

interactions in development cooperation, V4 governments could think of conducting more comparative studies about their recent transformation experiences and their operationalisation for sharing with partner countries.

Finally, the latest and maybe the most obvious reason why V4 countries have not collaborated more in the area of development cooperation is that simply the time was not ripe for that, as all of them needed this period first to develop their own systems and competences and to grow aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Once this stage is completed, they may find themselves more willing to pool their resources and explore opportunities for joint initiatives in the future. One area that deserves more attention in this context is the Eastern Partnership (EP).

**Eastern Partnership (EP): a Testing Ground for the V4 Brand in Development Cooperation**

V4 countries have vested interests in the stability and prosperity of the EP region, and it weighs heavy on their foreign policy agendas. Even though not all Visegrad members prioritise the region equally and Hungary may be more engaged in the Balkans and feel less proximity to Eastern neighbours than Poland or Slovakia, the whole group pays high attention to the developments in the East.\(^\text{32}\) The EP has usually found an important place in the V4 presidency agendas and was prioritised during the Czech and Polish presidencies of the EU Council in 2009 and 2011 respectively. The existing convergence of basic principles and interests in the region gives V4 members a solid foundation for closer cooperation on development issues.

Secondly, V4 countries are already providing development assistance to EP countries and consider them as priority destinations in terms of bilateral aid. Poland considers all six EP countries to be its long-term priority partners; Slovakia tends to list four EP countries among its long-term priority partners; and the Czech Republic and Hungary each list two (see Table 2). Comparable data from 2010 shows significant aid flows from V4 to EP countries (Table 5). This region is clearly the most important for Poland, which had five countries among the top ten recipients of its bilateral aid. Ukraine was receiving substantial aid from all V4 countries, while Moldova and Georgia were among the top ten destinations for aid for three of them (except Hungary). On the other

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hand, among the top ten donors for Belarus, two were from V4—Poland (fifth) and the Czech Republic (tenth), and at least one donor from the V4 is regularly among the top ten donors to all EP countries. This shows that, if V4 countries decided to act together in the EP, their combined budget would make them a major donor. Their impact, significance and influence in these countries would increase substantially.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top 10 recipients of aid from V4 countries in 2010 ($ million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Czech Republic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country Name</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moldova</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Georgia</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kosovo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bosnia and Herzegovina</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ukraine</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Finally, it should be underlined that the V4 transition experience, considered as their added value in development cooperation, is the most valid for the post-Soviet countries of the Eastern Partnership. Due to the cultural and geographical proximity, historical links and European integration aspirations prevalent across the region, the V4 lessons can be more relevant and transferable to Eastern neighbours than to any other countries undergoing transition around the world. V4 countries have a lot to offer in terms of assisting EP states in their troubled way to democracy, undergoing internal adjustments to prepare for EU accession, and managing economic and social reforms. If the comparative advantages of the V4 states have been chosen correctly, this is the region which could benefit the most.

Although the first attempt to carry out a joint project for Moldova in 2011 is worth appreciating, there is much more they can do together. Apparently the new
Visegrad 4-Eastern Partnership programme (V4EaP) agreed on in 2011 and launched by the International Visegrad Fund in 2012 (with an initial budget of €1,456,800) to support the “sharing of the V4 transformation experience, regional cooperation, cross-border cooperation,”\(^\text{33}\) is a step in the right direction. Furthermore, one can wonder if establishing separate V4 funding exclusively for development cooperation with EP countries in different areas would better serve common development objectives. Several experts have already offered many recommendations to facilitate V4 democracy assistance to EP partners. These include strengthening the role of V4 embassies, strengthening the role of NGOs and civil society, scholarships for young democracy activists and setting up a joint Visegrad Democracy Fund.\(^\text{34}\)

It is also important to encourage comparative studies on V4 transition experiences, strengthening collaboration between NGOs and enhancing the capacities of V4 institutions to provide more systemic and long-term assistance to EP countries. Governments may even consider setting up a Visegrad centre of excellence on transition management based in one of the regional capitals, which could run centralised and comprehensive programmes in different fields, taking advantages of the distinct expertise of its members. To strengthen coordination and the division of labour between V4 members and pool their resources under the single banner, they could explore the possibilities for a joint programming exercise for regional country strategy papers for chosen EP partners. Since all are already present in Moldova this seems the country most suitable for a joint V4 strategy.

To make progress in supporting changes in EP countries, V4 members would, however, need to further prioritise development cooperation. Even though this issue appeared on the agenda of the current Polish V4 presidency, its traditional location, among the latest priorities, shows that this is still a largely marginalised area.\(^\text{35}\) The fact that development and political objectives converge in EP countries may encourage V4 leaders to attach more attention to this area. More intense V4 meetings dedicated to development cooperation could help to diffuse


existing doubts and misunderstanding and help work out new ideas for the future. It seems apparent that it will be difficult for Poland to play a leading role in V4 development assistance for the EP. Thus more activity from smaller V4 members in the area should be welcomed. It is equally important to look at the V4 aid to the region from the perspective of aid beneficiaries. This would help to depoliticise development assistance, decrease competition between V4 members and better serve people in EP countries.

**Conclusions**

Visegrad countries have achieved considerable progress in transition from recipients to providers of development assistance. All V4 countries except Hungary have already completed reforms giving a solid legal and strategic basis for the provision of aid in a more mature manner. Development cooperation, which started in V4 countries as an external phenomenon imposed by the EU, has become better incorporated into the domestic agenda and found its place in a foreign policy toolbox. It has also developed distinct characteristics evident in the prioritisation of cooperation with European neighbours in democracy support and human rights. This entailed politicisation and less strict adherence to international standards regarding the quantity and quality of aid. Rather than being influenced by the EU, the V4 approach to development cooperation has made an imprint on European development policy.

The new member states’ insistence on democracy and the conditionality of aid coincides with recent changes in the EU approach in this area. Streamlining development cooperation within the foreign policy fold and the commercialisation of aid observed in older EU donors, as well as the prioritisation of democracy support by the EU, as shown by the Agenda for Change and the new Neighbourhood policy (“more for more” approach) shows that differences between old and new donors in Europe are narrower than ever. Although the talk about the “Easternisation” of European development cooperation may be an exaggeration at this point, the V4 policy in this area has found itself more in the mainstream of EU policy.

Having gone through similar experiences in their evolution as new donors, V4 members are still confronted with the same challenges, especially financial constraints, limited human resources and relatively small expertise. With the increased budget pressures at a time of European financial crisis, there is little hope these countries will increase their ODA by 2015. Instead they can use this period to strengthen their national systems and look for more effective and
innovative ways of regional cooperation. After completing the first phase of developing national policies and competences, the second phase of more active presence in international development cooperation may be prone to start.

This paper has underlined many similarities and convergences of Visegrad development policies, arguing that there is great untapped potential for more joint action in this area. Even though this will not be easy, as there are many obstacles to overcome, including regional competition and instrumentalisation of development policy, the effort is definitively worth making. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia could do more together in sharing their lessons and best practices in establishing national development cooperation systems, supporting more cooperation between NGOs in foreign assistance, funding comparative studies on their transition experiences and launching joint programmes for African and LDC states, where their individual presence and capabilities are weak. V4 governments could jointly discuss the future of their assistance to Afghanistan, a major recipient of bilateral aid in recent years, after their troops are withdrawn from that country and the PRTs are disbanded. V4 countries may seek inspiration in the joint development cooperation programmes of Nordic countries (Nordic+) and try to extend the idea of “Visegrad Houses” in priority developing countries, where their individual presence is not sustainable, also on development issues.

One area that seems especially promising for joint action is the Eastern Partnership. A number of historic, geographical, societal and strategic concerns make this region the most receptive to V4 expertise in transition management. If V4 countries want to make their presence felt in the region they would, however, need to further increase their bilateral assistance and seek ways to pool their resources within the regional division of labour scheme. Experience in effective development cooperation with EP countries could provide a major boost to V4 cooperation in general. If properly implemented, development cooperation could not only strengthen V4 ties but also improve the effectiveness and quality of their aid programmes. To exploit this potential, V4 governments would, however, need to first and foremost acknowledge development cooperation as an independent and important element of their external relations and not simply as a foreign policy tool. A more regular official dialogue between deputy foreign ministers responsible for development cooperation could be a helpful step to prioritise development issues and map complementarities and discuss opportunities for common action.
Rethinking the Future of the Visegrad Group
at a Time of Heated Debate on the Future of the EU

Introduction

Four years into the global economic crisis, the European Union today faces multiple crises that increasingly imply institutional problems and those of democratic legitimacy. The more urgent the need for accelerated European integration becomes the more divided are the Member States. Such complex and tense conjuncture generates the need to rethink strategies, not only at the Member State and EU levels but also at the regional level. This is especially the case for smaller countries or those with limited political leverage in the EU because regional platforms can serve well as forums for consultation and alliance-building and are vital for furthering common positions at the European negotiating table. Amidst such a potent debate on the future of the EU, the Visegrad Group—Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia—is also justified in looking back at its two decades of shared experience, and in the light of that to swiftly assess its present capacities to best profit from this regional partnership.

This paper will first draw up a brief account of the general dynamics of cooperation throughout the Visegrad timeline and then will present and assesses achievements in the most relevant areas in which the four states cooperate, namely foreign policy, European affairs, civil society, energy security, economic issues, and security and defence. This analysis of the V4’s activity and potential aims to find out which of the efforts undertaken had or have the most efficacy. The conclusions should then serve as valuable hints of sensible directions for further cooperation for both the short and long terms in order to assure substance in the future of the Visegrad Group regardless of the new constellation of the EU.
Oscillations in the Dynamics of Visegrad Group Cooperation

Launched in February 1991 in the Hungarian town of Visegrad\(^1\) at a meeting of the leaders of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland, the main purpose of the Visegrad initiative was to achieve membership in NATO and the EU, rather than establish intra-regional cooperation. It is important to note that the initial objectives of the project were joint activities for achieving higher levels of integration in the European and Euro-Atlantic political and economic structures, which suggests that the initiative was predominantly “a political project developed according to a ‘top-down’ approach.”\(^2\) That is to say, that behind the ambitions of the political leaders was no citizens’ initiative, hence the low level of public awareness about the existence and importance of the regional group throughout the first decade of its operation.

Additionally, despite the otherwise quite intense cooperation of the first few years, the low level of institutionalisation weakened the chances of the format to secure informal rules about cooperation and coordination. This factor, together with the 1993 disintegration of Czechoslovakia and the domestic political developments that followed in the two newly established states led to a slowdown in the operation of the Visegrad Group. Neither the Czech Republic, under the premiership of Václav Klaus (1993–1997), nor Slovakia under Vladimír Mečiar (1992–1998), demonstrated much keenness for regional cooperation. The Czech leaders felt their neighbours’ company was a force hindering them from a speedy catch-up with the EU, while Slovakia set off on a “nation-building path” that was less than compatible with the underlying principles of the Visegrad initiative, which are the equal participation of all of the partners and a sense of solidarity.

The end of the 1990s saw a turn in Slovakia’s position as well as significant advancement in its prospects for NATO and European integration. Such favourable developments revitalised interest in cooperation, especially since the pre-accession period required increased synchronisation of positions and exchanges of experience. Following that effort, with the 2004 accession of the

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1 The choice of location at the proposal of then Hungarian Prime Minister—and historian by profession—József Antall was one of symbolic significance. The same settlement gave place in 1335 to the meeting of the rulers of medieval Bohemia, Hungary and Poland to settle territorial disputes and establish common trade routes.

four countries to the EU, many saw the *raison d’être* of the regional group coming to an end. Nonetheless, its post-accession strategy, as pronounced in the Visegrad Declaration at Kroměříž on 12 May 2004, asserted its firm intentions to continue regional cooperation and the creation of a regional identity.

**A Field-by-Field Analysis of the Efficacy of the Cooperation**

In order to be able to identify some possible trajectories for the regional group, an evaluation of its achievements in various areas of cooperation needs to be compiled. The selection of the analysed fields is subjective and focuses on areas in which the Visegrad Group has the highest stakes in cooperation (even if only with limited success) and areas in which the most results have been achieved or can potentially be achieved. In selecting the areas, special attention was awarded to the priorities of the Polish presidency of the Visegrad Group between July 2012 and June 2013. The document divides its objectives into foreign policy priorities (including European affairs), the development of civil society contacts, and sectoral priorities (including among numerous other topics, energy, economic issues, and security and defence).

**Foreign policy.** Due to more or less a common eastern and south-eastern neighbourhood and the legacy of a shared past, the Visegrad countries have a natural overlap of their immediate foreign policy interest zones: the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership states. Added to this is an ever more-articulated attempt to shape the common foreign policy of the EU, which offers a more sophisticated cooperation platform for the Central European states. However, despite investments of effort in trying to coordinate their external actions, these countries are vulnerable to internal divisions as a result of divergent positions towards the most significant players in the international arena, that is, the U.S., China and—from a Central and Eastern European perspective, most important—Russia. Such divides are to the detriment of coordinated actions in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Cases that illustrate well the inconsistencies of Eastern policy were the 2005 Orange revolution in Ukraine as well as the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia.

In addition to the Russian question, a further hindrance to drawing up a successful common foreign policy is the varying degree of commitment of the
Visegrad states towards certain regions. This can, again, be easily explained by geographical vicinity and to some extent shared socio-historical developments. For instance, Poland’s major priority is the Eastern Partnership (a project it conceived in 2008 with Sweden), and within that its direct neighbours, Ukraine and Belarus, both home to Polish minorities. Precisely because of this focus on the East, in practical terms Poland is far less engaged in the Western Balkans than its fellow Visegrad members.\(^5\) While Poland advocates for enlargement at the European debating table, it is, however, engaged with those countries to a far less extent than it is in the Eastern Neighbourhood. In turn, Hungary, Slovakia, and, to a more limited extent, the Czech Republic are not just highly interested in the cause of the Western Balkans, but often compete in their engagement in the region. Hungary can boast of concrete achievements in terms of European integration of the Western Balkans, as Croatia’s accession talks were successfully concluded during the Hungarian presidency of the EU Council in the first half of 2011. Hungarian diplomacy has also employed special efforts to push for granting candidate status to Serbia. Slovakia, too, has acted through its diplomatic capacities\(^6\) as well as through considerable amounts of development aid and civil society engagement via its NGOs operating on the ground in the region.\(^7\) Further, the Visegrad states’ approaches also differ on the status of Kosovo: Slovakia remains one of the five EU countries\(^8\) that does not recognise the independence of Kosovo, declared in 2008. Such discrepancies certainly affect the engagement of the Visegrad Group in the region because positions on the Kosovo case directly influence their approaches to other issues in the Western Balkans, for instance that of Serbia’s European integration.

As such, while common declarations are published on a regular basis, “practical engagement comes more from individual members of the Visegrad


\(^6\) This is well exemplified for instance by the current Foreign Minister of Slovakia Miroslav Lajčák having served as—among other notable diplomatic positions in the Western Balkans—the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina/EU Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina between 2007 and 2009.


\(^8\) The others being Cyprus, Greece, Romania and Spain.
Group, not so much from the group as a whole.” This phenomenon can best be explained through the states’ desire for visibility on the international scene, which means grabbing any occasion of provable activity as a chance to gain prestige for themselves at the price of the group image. At the joint group level, probably the only coordinated efforts have been to organise conferences involving officials, experts or members of civil society.

Despite difficulties in taking common action in the southern and eastern neighbourhoods, the Visegrad states remain the EU Member States with the highest stakes in integrating these countries. Moreover, they offer undisputable added-value vis-à-vis other regional actors because of the soft power they wield based on their transformation and integration experience. They are both able and willing to share this know-how provided that the partner countries are open and receptive enough and that the necessary means are available to do so. The most important contribution in this respect is being delivered by the International Visegrad Fund within the framework of the so called Visegrad 4 Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme launched in 2011.

**European policy.** The area with the highest urgency for concerted action—especially at a time when multiple crises have triggered a series of reforms in the EU—undoubtedly is European policy. At the same time, this is the area where the Visegrad countries demonstrate the least consistencies in their approaches. Because of these highly discernible differences they seem to opt to rather minimise coordination efforts in a way similar to avoiding discussing positions on Russia, another issue of high sensitivity that leaves little room for regional perspectives ahead of national interests.11

There are two indicators of the differences that impinge upon the chances for the Visegrad Group to hold common positions in European matters: one is their attitudes towards further economic and political integration, and the other is their relations to other Member States or groups of Member States (for instance,

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9 Eduard Kukan in the interview conducted by Lucia Najšlová, “Time for the EU to Deal Fairly with the Western Balkans,” *Visegrad Insight*, no. 1, 2012, p. 72.

10 The launch of this special grant facility to support the Eastern Partnership as part of the International Visegrad Fund was agreed on 16 June 2011. Each of the four Visegrad states has undertaken to allocate 250,000 euros annually for this initiative, which means a moderate increase in the Fund’s budget from 6 to 7 million euros.

11 M. Kořan, conclusion at the conference entitled “The Future of European Integration: Visegrad Perspectives” in Warsaw, 19 October 2012.
members of the eurozone), which might sometimes outweigh their loyalties to the Visegrad Group.

Regarding their visions and policies of the future of the EU, if to place the positions of the four countries on an imaginary axis between the two poles of euro-optimism and euro-scepticism, the following tendencies may be observed. Through its consistent European policy, Poland categorically places itself towards the pro-integration end of the axis. In both economic and political integration, Poland demonstrates more responsibility and devotion than many of the eurozone states, despite not being one of them. Furthermore, it is concentrating its efforts to prevent a “multi-speed” approach or differentiated integration of the EU with the division line possibly along the eurozone borders. At the same time, trying to be prepared ultimately for a split, Poland is seeking a seat for itself at the negotiating table of insiders while at the same time remaining hesitant about entry to the eurozone.

Slovakia is technically the face of the most advanced integration (it is a member of the eurozone since 2009), yet it has proved to be able to only conditionally fulfil its obligations under its eurozone membership status during the first years of the crisis. However, public opinion is still generally embracing the European project, and since the spring 2012 parliamentary elections there is also large political consensus on the main directions for European policy.

Hungary would come next. A certain degree of discrepancy can be observed between the domestic political discourse, relying to a large extent on the ideas of national sovereignty and independence from international financial institutions, and the government’s actual actions, which mostly still demonstrate alignment with the European cause. Nonetheless, despite the declared political will for “more Europe,” the present economic parameters, together with the current so-called unorthodox economic policy of the Hungarian government, places the likelihood of being accepted into the eurozone in the more distant future.

Finally, the Czech Republic would clearly occupy a place closest to the euro-sceptic pole. Its comparative economic stability and relative monetary independence allows for developing a vision of its own about the future of the EU. According to this, instead of seeking to deepen integration, the formula for today’s Europe would instead be a loose confederation of sovereign states, and reform efforts should be invested in the further liberalisation of the internal

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12 An exception to this was the refusal to join the Euro Plus Pact in March 2011 together with Great Britain and Sweden.
market. It is also notable that the Czech public has traditionally been rather moderate in its support of the common currency, an attitude understandably in line with the dominant line of thought of the political elite. With this attitude, the Czech Republic is the loudest contender to integration, not just by Visegrad standards but probably the entire EU.\textsuperscript{13}

While consensus in the near future on matters of further integration will be hard to achieve, if at all, fortunately there are European policy areas where the Visegrad countries can more easily harmonise their stances. One such example is the ongoing debate on the Multinational Financial Framework 2014–2020 (MFF). What makes it reasonable to expect a common negotiating bloc in this particular matter is the similarity in the countries’ economic profiles and levels of social welfare, which automatically incur a political impact on their positions on the MFF. In addition to the size of the budget, two aspects of the MFF as proposed by the European Commission in June 2011 are contoured around areas in which it would be worth concentrating the V4’s efforts. The first is cohesion policy and the second the idea of introducing a Financial Transactions Tax as an own-resource under the budget, a solution that could improve the net positions of the four countries by as much as 5–10\%.\textsuperscript{14}

In their shared desire to optimise their net positions, three out of the four Visegrad countries support the budget proposal of the Commission, which would keep the size of the budget unaltered, because they are aware that this is the maximum sum they can hope for, all other alternatives result in a budget cut—the position taken by Germany, France and other net contributors, whose circle the Czech Republic has also joined. Nevertheless, the Czech Republic is collaborating with the Visegrad countries in efforts to oppose the reduction of allocations under cohesion policy. With such conflicting interests—support for a lower budget but strong cohesion policy—the Czech Republic is following a twin-track policy of siding simultaneously with both groups, the so called “Friends of Cohesion” (Member States that support an increase in this area) and the “Like-Minded” (Member States against any increase). Such a state of affairs not only places the Czech Republic itself in a difficult situation to balance but also endangers the prospects of forging a common Visegrad position on an issue as vital as structural funds.


A further threat in this respect is the vulnerability of the Visegrad Group to proposals such as the “reverse safety net,” which would place the Visegrad countries on two opposing sides of the negotiating table (in this particular case, Hungary and Poland). This is exactly the strategy the other net contributors will employ: divide the group by picking off individual members of the V4, thus significantly diminishing their potential common negotiating powers.

In comparison with the V4’s cohesion policy stances, the FTT is of secondary importance and stands less of a chance of compromise. While the Czech Republic and Hungary are against the introduction of this new, own-budget source, arguing that it would further complicate the current system, Poland is in favour of it as it would result in a lower contribution to the budget due to the fact that its financial market has moderate financial flows.

Civil society contacts. While less spectacular in terms of policymaking and also gaining less media attention than other attempted common Visegrad efforts, cooperation in culture, science and education is the one field where the regional group can show veritable achievements. Founded in 2000 and based in Bratislava, the International Visegrad Fund (IVF) is the entity in charge of funding common initiatives in this field. Collecting an equal amount of annual contributions from the four Visegrad governments, the IVF’s budget was €7 million as of 2012. The various types of regular grants awarded by the fund support such things as common cultural projects, youth exchanges, cross-border types of cooperation as well as individual mobility programmes, such as scholarships and residencies.

The scope of the organisation goes beyond the borders of the Visegrad states, aiming at closing up the gaps with countries from the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership. The Visegrad countries have not only a natural and shared interest in these regions but also relevant transformational and transitional experience that they wish to share through these channels. In addition to this, such cooperation platforms can also be seen as a vehicle of indirectly fostering European integration of the neighbourhood.

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15 A Dutch proposal to introduce a mechanism that would double-cap cohesion funds to the net beneficiaries stipulating that sums will be based on current allocations.


17 See the official website of the International Visegrad Fund: www.visegradfund.org.
Energy policy. Energy security is the issue that has lately produced the most spectacular flicker of revival of Visegrad cooperation as a consequence of the gas crises in 2006 and 2009. These incidents revealed the dangers of dependence on Russian gas and the lack of an alternative to the east–west transit route. Ever since those troublesome cases the most vocal intention, coupled with a serious demonstration of determination to coordinate the policies of the Visegrad Four, is noticeable in energy policy. The aim is to improve energy security and achieve lower dependence on raw materials supplied from Russia. These goals are to be attained through the development of a more complex transport infrastructure that would enable the diversification of natural gas transport routes and supply sources as well as the integration of domestic gas transport systems. While energy supply composition, and hence the degree of dependency on Eastern supplies are somewhat different, the major concern for all states remains dependency on Russia, effectively constraining them from coordinating their positions and acting in a timely fashion.

The main identified solutions rely on building a system of alternative import routes based on the Nabucco gas pipeline and the planned liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in Poland at Świnoujście, in Croatia on the island of Krk, and in the Black Sea region in Romania at Constanța and in Bulgaria at Varna. Parallel to this attempt to diversify supply sources, a high priority has been placed on the construction of connections between national gas systems so as to ensure efficient gas transport, not only in emergency situations but also for distribution from the new import infrastructure, meaning Nabucco and the LNG terminals. Since its conception in 2002, the initial impetus for the Nabucco project has much waned and was at the verge of collapsing; however, in autumn 2011 it was changed into a more modest project and re-named Nabucco West. Instead of the initially planned route from the Caspian Sea area to the Austrian distribution hub at Baumgarten, Nabucco West would only transport gas from the Turkish–Bulgarian border. Its capacity has also been reduced threefold. However, its implementation would mean a significant difference for the Visegrad countries, primarily for Hungary, where the pipeline would transit, but also to an as yet unclear extent for the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which would probably also gain access to Caspian gas arriving through Nabucco.

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A further dimension for cooperation is in meeting climate policy commitments via consultations among the V4 members and in formulating common positions that would significantly improve the region’s bargaining position in EU-level climate-policy discussions. Valuable political consensus on this topic has already been proved, but there is a need to translate it into more practical, pragmatic, business-oriented cooperation, which would ensure a more beneficial distribution of costs and benefits of EU climate policy.

**Economic issues.** Beyond the general aim of European and Euro-Atlantic integration in sectoral terms—quite naturally—economic cooperation initially had been one of the main priorities of the Visegrad states. It started with the establishment of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) as early as in 1992 with the scope of consolidating market economies, fostering intra-regional trade in goods and services and integrating their institutions into European structures. The strong commitment to economic cooperation was well demonstrated by the fact that even when the ever-sceptical Czech prime minister, Václav Klaus, disrupted other aspects of Visegrád activities in the second half of the 1990s, condemning the group as a creation of the West, he still did not cease support for the economic aspects of their cooperation.

Similarities in the structures of the V4 members’ economic systems emanating on one hand from the common legacy of command economies and, on the other hand, from geographical similarities (on this point, Poland is more of the odd one out due to its size and exit to the sea), largely facilitated their integration. However, these similarities are today exactly the obstacles mostly standing in the way of continuing their once eager economic cooperation, which in the course of their transitions has been gradually converted into rivalry. Due to similarities such as industrial profiles (notably in the automotive industry, but also in other branches such as electronic equipment, construction and the pharmaceutical industry), high dependence on exports, similar levels of social welfare (each countries’ GDP per capita level in Purchasing Power Standards is between €16,000 and €20,000),

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19 Ibidem.
20 When joining the EU in 2004 all of the initial members have quit CEFTA leaving it as a pre-accession camp for the south-eastern states which have in the meantime gradually acceded to it. Today its members are the Republic of Moldova and the Western Balkans.
22 Here Poland being an obvious exception because of its extensive domestic market which makes it the only Visegrad country with a negative current economic balance.
relatively strong banking systems, certain structural problems half-heartedly resolved in the transition process\textsuperscript{23} and many economic parameters standardised due to EU membership, today the Visegrad countries see each other as competitors in a certain respect, for instance, when it comes to foreign direct investment.

Indeed, despite differences in the foreign trade balances of the individual countries, most foreign investors and analysts tend to perceive the Visegrad states as “one region with similar economic development, economic composition, and the same prospects for the future.”\textsuperscript{24} This tendency is increasingly signalled by the investment policies of the largest global actors, such as Germany, Russia, and most importantly, China, the capital of whom the Visegrad countries are more and more competing for. One sectoral example could be transport, as Slovakia and the Czech Republic have long aspired to the role of a regional logistics hub for which infrastructure would be developed on foreign capital. Recently, Poland and Hungary have also joined the race for a Chinese presence in banking services after the Bank of China opened its second Central European branch in Warsaw in April 2012 (the first is located in Budapest).\textsuperscript{25} While a natural rivalry, in such areas as investments, is undoubtedly an inseparable part of any regional initiative,\textsuperscript{26} it should be differentiated from the selfish ambitions of any particular country, keeping in mind the destructive influence it can have on the quality of cooperation. Building on such a logic, the Visegrad states should rather work out common investment-attraction strategies.

Certain divergences in economic thinking became exposed with the economic and financial crisis as the four states employed largely different strategies with sparse effort to find a harmonised response. According to French Central Europe expert Jacques Rupnik, such a split, however, only highlights the V4 members’ contrasting perceptions on the future of European integration—from staunchly “sovereignist” to devotedly “pro-European” attitudes\textsuperscript{27}—rather than differences in economic systems and policy priorities. In a vital moment requiring a common voice, it was not just that


\textsuperscript{26} T. Strážay, \textit{op. cit}, p. 37.

the small sizes of their economies (the exception, again, being Poland) and lack of membership in the eurozone (except for Slovakia) does not permit them to have real impact on the planning and activation of anti-crisis mechanisms and projects involving institutional changes but also that the four Visegrad countries have demonstrated an almost complete lack of intra-regional solidarity.

Nevertheless, one must add at this point that the crisis has had quite different impacts on the countries in question. Poland has weathered the crisis the best, not only by regional standards but also compared to Europe as a whole, and is widely referred to as a kind of economic miracle on the continent as the only Member State that has maintained economic growth since 2009 when the crisis began. Even though today the effects of the crisis are far more palpable in Poland, too, it is true that rather than a threat, the economic downturn is being used by Poland as an opportunity to “take responsibility and formulate a response to the European challenge.” Such active involvement, characterised by a determination to further integrate with the EU not only economically and fiscally but also politically, is a rather outstanding choice at a time when most other non-eurozone members are more than content to distance themselves from the situation as much as they can.

An example of this is the Czech Republic, whose long-standing lukewarm stance to the European Union—and to the common currency within that—is now perfectly justified by the multiple crises. Even though there is a substantial debate on European issues in the Czech political elite, with the centre right advocating for less while the social democrats and liberal conservatives favour more Europe, whenever the Czechs are reminded of their treaty obligation to join the currency union they hurry to emphasise that the circumstances have significantly changed since the country signed the Treaty of Accession, and hence conditions are ripe to be reconsidered as well.

Slovakia, similar to the Czech Republic, has sustained only limited damage to its economy. As the only Visegrad country in the eurozone during the times of hardship, it nonetheless seems to act as if it regrets its membership and follows suit only out of constraint.

Finally, Hungary’s economy was the most depressed by the crisis because its foundations had already been shaken as early as 2006, well before the onset of

28 J. Rupnik, op. cit., p. 49.
29 This is what its refusal to contribute to the European Financial Stability Mechanism in autumn 2011 tells about in the opinion of Jacques Rupnik. See: J. Rupnik, op. cit., p. 50.
the global economic crisis. Despite such an unfavourable starting point, the Hungarian government has long tried to defy foreign financial institutions in the name of political and economic sovereignty. Eventually it surrendered and appealed for new credit from the International Monetary Fund in 2011, not least to buy back some credibility with the markets.

Overall, it could be stated that while the Central European economies have been seriously challenged by the crisis—some in terms of economic growth, others more systemically—the Visegrad countries have faced the crisis relatively better than the rest of the EU, contrary to the general conception. One explanation for this might be that these states have proved they have more affinity with the north European kind of fiscal discipline rather than south European laxity.\textsuperscript{30}

It is thus clear that, along with the general European trend, these countries’ confidence in the common currency has at least been shaken. Nevertheless, they all remain aware that the possible collapse of the euro would drag much of the region into deep recession. As emerging markets, these states remain highly vulnerable to rapid capital outflow (already ongoing because eurozone banks short of money are withdrawing stakes from their branches in the region), which usually leads to serious devaluation of the domestic currency, a rise in import prices, then inflation. As such, no matter how hesitant the Visegrad states remain, individually or as a group, towards eurozone accession, it stands in their best interest not to work against efforts to save the currency.

Despite altering their positions on further economic integration in general or on eurozone entry in particular, what remains clearly in the common interest, and hence the absolute minimum to strive for together, is safeguarding and possibly further liberalising the internal market. Various aspects of the EU Single Market Agenda such as establishing a single digital market as well as further liberalisation of other services could boost sustainable growth in the region. Especially so when keeping in mind that 70–90\% of Visegrad exports go to the EU and the high intra-regional flow of goods and services that make the Visegrad states each others’ top trade partners\textsuperscript{31} after Germany, the number one export destination for all four states.

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Ibidem.}

\textsuperscript{31} The Czech Republic and Slovakia occupy the second positions after Germany as external trade partners for each other. For Hungary Slovakia is the second most significant partner from the region (also after Germany) and for Poland it is the Czech Republic. For more detailed analysis of the foreign trade profiles of the Visegrad countries see: T. Szemler, A. Éltető (eds.), “V4 Trade and FDI Observer,” ICEG European Center, Budapest, May 2012.
**Security and defence.** After successfully joining NATO (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in 1999, and Slovakia in 2004), international cooperation in security issues were largely dealt with on the transatlantic platform. Nevertheless, a chain of factors has lately generated a new trend of smaller scale multilateral cooperation, a trend to which the Visegrad Group has duly adhered. This turn towards regional-level cooperation should be viewed in the context of a wider strategic shift from the more ambitious top-down initiatives of the EU and NATO of the late 1990s and early 2000s towards a format of limited, bottom-up cooperation amongst smaller groups of states.32 A further catalyst of this trend is the economic crisis, which is tightening national budget areas in security and defence.

In the specific case of Central Europe, to these factors must be added the traditional underlying fears of Russia built on powerful historical recollections that were perhaps revived by the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia. Furthermore, concerns as to whether NATO provides a genuine umbrella of security to the region33 were raised by the case of the Libyan mission, which displayed the Alliance’s acute inability to create a broad, coherent strategy and deploy adequate resources outside of U.S. and British assets to handle the conflict. Confidence in the Atlantic partnership was further abated when the Obama administration turned away from its initial plans to set up an anti-missile defence shield on the territories of Poland and the Czech Republic. This became yet another reason for the Visegrad states to undertake joint efforts on the security of the region. Their two decades’ worth of experience with structural dialogue, shared history and similar foreign policy priorities and threat perceptions provided more than sufficient logical grounds for such an endeavour.

The flagship idea of this new trend of defence cooperation is the so called Visegrad Battle Group. Its creation was announced on 12 May 2011, and it is scheduled to become operational in 2016 and to adhere to the EU’S Common Security and Defence Policy. The battlegroup would be an independent force of the Visegrad states coordinated by Poland rather than under the direct command of NATO. This independent regional force initiative was made on the basis of a concept developed by the EU within the framework of a reformed defence plan. EU battlegroups are conceived as small, national or multinational

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rapid-reaction units with autonomous command and logistics capabilities meant to react quickly to a crisis beyond the EU’s borders and to help prevent broader bloodshed or escalation of a conflict.\textsuperscript{34} The sole considerable previous materialisation of this concept\textsuperscript{35} was the Nordic Battle Group, which also served as a precedent to the Visegrad Battlegroup. While the actual military significance of the battlegroup is questionable (plans call for 3,000 soldiers), what is significant is the V4’s strategic decision to form an alliance and take responsibility for their own national security,\textsuperscript{36} which signals an important development in the security thinking of the leaders in the region.

Although the battlegroup can be considered a strong symbol of the countries’ commitment to European defence cooperation within both the EU and NATO and because it constitutes a concrete pledge of new military capability, plenty of room remains for criticism. On one hand, doubts about the effort target the general viability of the idea of multinational battlegroups, which have never been tested in action, and, on the other hand, in the particular case of the Visegrad states such a battlegroup is far from providing for the military needs of the region.\textsuperscript{37} It should rather be viewed as a first step towards a more comprehensive defence-cooperation project, the future of which remains under a bolded question mark.

Further elements of the project are considered “pooling and sharing”\textsuperscript{38} of defence capabilities. As a consequence of the financial constraints caused by the economic crisis, the Visegrad countries—consistent with the general trend amongst their fellow NATO members—have cut tens of billions of euros from their defence budgets. Keeping in mind that economic growth is most likely to remain stagnant for the foreseeable future, NATO member states need to seek improvement of their defence establishments, for instance via cross-border

\textsuperscript{34} The concept of the battlegroup was formulated on the basis of the success of Operation Artemis in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2003, where a French-led contingent reinforced a UN mission for a limited period of time. The battlegroup proved indispensable as a rapid-reaction capability for the purpose of early intervention in an acute crisis.

\textsuperscript{35} However, around 20 battlegroups have so far been publicly announced by EU Members States and are in various stages of formation.

\textsuperscript{36} G. Friedman, \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{37} T. Weiss, \textit{op. cit.}

Such a solution would enable “aligning the use of their fixed military infrastructure, sharing facilities and services, or buying and maintaining the next generation of weapons together,” thus preserving defence capabilities otherwise unaffordable. Moreover, this military collaboration would also strengthen the participating countries’ political weight in NATO and the EU.

Clearly, such “pooling and sharing” has already been undertaken, for instance, by the Nordic countries and the Benelux formation, and requires a high level of inter-state trust because of the sensitive nature of the assets that would be shared. However, unless the Visegrad states also decide to undertake such measures, they might find themselves reduced to possessing only showcase forces sufficient only to preserve the illusion of national sovereignty but incapable of safeguarding it.

**Conclusion**

In order to balance coherence versus heterogeneity in the various policy fields in which the Visegrad countries ambitiously propose to work together, it can be observed that the most visible results are in energy and civil cooperation (culture, education and science) both inside the Visegrad Group and with the regions neighbouring it to the east and south. Success in the first field of cooperation can be explained through highly constraining external conjuncture urging the grouping towards prompt action, while success in the second is because of the fact that this is the only area that needs practically no particular political consensus for cooperation, rather just the pooling of a moderate amount of financial sources. As such, the common undertaken measures suggest that perhaps the most genuine devotion to and the furthest steps in the Visegrad format may be expected in energy issues and the civic dimension.

Foreign policy, and more specifically that in the direction of the eastern and southeastern neighbourhoods, closely follows achievements in energy cooperation. Efforts in these directions gain shape mostly in the V4’s advocacy for these regions in EU circles (proceeding with the enlargement process, liberalising the visa systems, etc.) and by bi- or multi-lateral cooperation aimed at establishing stronger civil ties. While streamlining the eastern and southeastern policy of the Visegrad Group leaves much room for improvement, obstacles in this matter are more of a subjective nature, hence with more

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39 For detailed suggestions on what form such cooperation could potentially take see: *Ibidem.*

40 *Ibidem.*
flexibility for at least partial elimination. Perhaps a better clarification of the exact priorities and the division of roles and tasks would allow for more coordinated action, and thus each of the Visegrad states could live up to its own potential.

In terms of economic cooperation, it seems that on the completion of EU membership—and with all the freedoms it brought for international trade—both the impetus and the capacity for particular efforts of further cooperation have largely been diminished. Instead, the present similarities of the V4 in terms of their economic profiles and performances rather makes way for competition for foreign investment. While further harmonisation of trade and investment policies of the Visegrad countries could bring much added value, this remains a sensitive issue due to the considerable stakes it involves.

Even though objectives in the security and defence arena used to be one of the key pillars on which the Visegrad Group stood before NATO accession, and despite efforts for further steps in regional cooperation during the past few years, the still ongoing economic crisis has pushed such costly priorities from the forefront of the agenda of not only the individual states but also the regional grouping.

Regarding positions in shaping the future of the European Union, divisions are deep, but few reasons for this are to be found in regional logic, as the constellation only reflects the continental-level pattern of the positions of the Member States. Even if the partners fail to reach entirely identical positions, consultation on a regular basis by simply exchanging information already helps promote their interests and leverage decision-making enough to think of the classic cooperation models of Benelux and the Nordic Council.41 A good demonstration of the potential weight the Visegrad Group can present if standing as one is the complaint voiced by former French President Nicolas Sarkozy in reaction to the Visegrad’s pre-EU summit meetings that were becoming habitual and which he interpreted as a threat to the then-common Franco-German voice.42 As Poland is now in charge of the V4 presidency, it has the best chances to show genuine accomplishments at the conclusion of its mandate, because the main priorities on the agenda at present belong to areas in which the Visegrad states can cooperate either quite naturally or with little need for political compromise,

including the negotiations on the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework 2014–2020 and the future of cohesion policy, energy security (particularly the North-South gas corridor) and the strengthening of contacts with countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans.

As for the question of the overall future of the Visegrad Group, one common trend apparently agreed by all four states seems to be a wish to extend and mostly deepen cooperation but without further institutionalisation. Such a solution would allow for flexibility, an essential feature of a grouping with divergent stances on so many issues and in constant need of adapting to circumstances rather than adhering to tight rules. As this solution implies that the bulk of what the Visegrad Group accomplishes will not be highly visible for the public, which however does not mean that any outcomes are totally lacking. It means, however, that the political leadership is less accountable and is able to mask a slowdown in activity. Therefore, the goal should be to improve activity and devise new accountability measures.

Expectations from the Visegrad Group should not be too high either, but rather remain within the horizons of what can be deemed realistic. Even if political scientists and analysts have a natural inclination to generalise, categorise or group states according to their geopolitical positions and claimed interests, and even if there is an undisputable rationale and political will behind the Visegrad initiative, the group cannot be treated as a coherent set of states. It could and should become more than it is, but it will never be a cohesive formation able to act fully in unison in all matters in which it has a will to harmonise positions and actions. What can realistically be expected from this cooperation, where it really has potential despite the discrepancies, is in cooperation in culture and education, democratisation and integration of the neighbourhood, energy interconnectivity and security, common investment projects, and negotiating a common stance on certain specific EU issues (such as the budget and cohesion policy).

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In Prague on 5 April 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama presented his long-term vision of a world without nuclear weapons. Even though Obama simultaneously stressed that as long as nuclear weapons exist the U.S. will maintain an effective nuclear deterrent, the speech gave new momentum to efforts towards nuclear abolition. For the first time, a U.S. president had officially put nuclear disarmament at the top of the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

It is likely that the Obama speech would never have taken place without an initiative by an elite, bipartisan group of former U.S. policymakers, all of whom had once contributed to shaping U.S. Cold War nuclear policy and posture—George Shultz and Henry Kissinger, both former Republican secretaries of state, William Perry, the former Democratic defence secretary, and Sam Nunn, the former Democratic senator and chairman of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee. In January 2007, the group co-authored the landmark op-ed “A World Free of Nuclear Weapons,” which was published in the Wall Street Journal. Without the input and inspiration provided by this essay and the extraordinary global positive reaction it sparked, Obama probably would not have made nuclear disarmament a signature initiative of his presidency. The goal of a nuclear weapons-free world would have remained outside the mainstream of policy debates.

The book by Philip Taubman, a former reporter and editor for The New York Times, offers an insightful story of how the core pieces were in place to generate the four statesmen’s disarmament initiative. Taubman recognises the invaluable contribution to the enterprise of Sidney Drell, a theoretical physicist at Stanford who spent decades advising the U.S. government on both nuclear weapons
development and arms control, and includes him in a list of the books "Cold Warriors."

The author provides a broad picture of the nuclear disarmament initiative’s origins using information from an extensive number of personal interviews and numerous books, articles, reports and unpublished documents on the subject. To show how the paths of the quintet eventually crossed, Taubman goes beyond just presenting their similar assessments of current nuclear threats, such as the risk of uncontrolled nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism. He presents a variety of facts from their rich biographies and personal traits that made their joint endeavour possible.

Taubman objectively reveals that the signatures on the op-ed were not no-brainers for the four former statesman. Until the last moment, it was not clear that Schultz, Kissinger, Perry and Nunn could overcome their differences and hesitations. The first convert to the vision of a nuclear weapons-free world and a driving force behind the effort was Schultz. Drell and his nuclear expertise played the role of Schultz’s “comfort blanket” by making the former secretary of state more confident about his ambitious vision. Perry and the initially more hesitant Nunn both added to the vision the practical steps needed to make it more pragmatic. As Nunn vividly describes it, “without the steps the vision wasn’t realistic” and “without the vision, you aren’t going to get the steps done” (p. 320).

The one with the greatest apprehension about his involvement in the disarmament initiative was Kissinger. According to Perry, Kissinger’s involvement resulted from the fact that “… Henry likes to be front and centre of big policy issues of the day, and this put him in that position, even though he didn’t fully agree with all of the conclusions” (p. 24). Kissinger himself thought that “embracing the goal, however unfeasible it might seem” could have several positive implications, including spurring new thinking on nuclear weapons and strengthening non-proliferation efforts (p. 322). Despite his doubts, it is unquestionable that his involvement buttressed the initiative. His fame provided the group with global reach and access to officials from states such as Russia and China.

The great value of The Partnership is the employment of historical perspective. While the historical and biographical retrospections lack detail and in-depth analysis, they improve on the understanding of the transformation of these Cold Warhawks into proponents of pragmatic steps towards nuclear abolition in the long term. The historical background offered encourages one to
dig deeper and to reach for Cold War history books and available biographies about the five men.

Taubman reveals how singularly the subjects’ Cold War professional experiences shaped the group’s nuclear disarmament quest. The references to these experiences enrich the book with behind-the-scenes pictures of essential moments of the era of the East–West confrontation. Among many things, the book shows the profound influence on Schultz of the 1986 Reykjavik summit, in which U.S. President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev unexpectedly put the elimination of all nuclear weapons on negotiating table. The author also explains how the unrealistic Cold War plans for the use of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons in Europe and their poor security have influenced Nunn’s views on NATO’s current nuclear posture.

References to the past are not limited to the history of nuclear diplomacy and arms control, though. To stress the strong defence credentials of the group and to pre-empt any uninformed reader from perceiving them as doves on security issues, the author describes their broader contributions to strengthening the U.S. military posture. The chapters about Perry’s and Drell’s roles in the research-and-development efforts that led to a revolution in the American military’s composition make the book a good read for military history wonks. Also, of interest to students of American political history, the book shows the different paths the men took in gaining their key posts in Washington and their work during some of the key political events in the U.S., including Kissinger’s and Schultz’s relations with Nixon during Watergate.

The Partnership contains many stimulating observations about the origins of certain ideas and how they become incorporated into U.S. foreign policy. It meticulously describes the various factors and inputs that led to the now-famous WSJ op-ed. The book confirms the roles of individual effort, personal relations and access to high-level officials as well as bipartisanship and the importance of organisations with appropriate infrastructure and funding in making any similar endeavour successful.

The author does not forget to include other institutions and individuals, such as Max Kampelman of Stanford University’s Hoover Institution and Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) staff members such as Steve Andreasen, whose works contributed to advancing the group’s effort. He briefly shows the origins of NTI’s Nuclear Security Project, which provided the framework and support for Schultz, Kissinger, Perry and Nunn’s agenda.
The Partnership offers a behind-the-scenes look at the political process that led to the recognition of the group’s goal by Obama. As Taubman sums up the mutual relationship between Obama and the essay’s authors, he writes, although “… the quartet needed the president’s backing to advance their goals; Obama needed the quartet’s support to raise nuclear issues above the killing ground of Washington politics” (p. 352).

Taubman describes a rather hesitant relationship between the group and another influential nuclear disarmament platform—the Global Zero project. The Cold Warriors do not share Global Zero’s approach to negotiate an international treaty that would set a date for reaching nuclear abolition. According to the group, such an approach could weaken efforts to strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and divert attention from addressing “urgent and achievable steps” (p. 340).

One thing the book does not do is attempt to present the group’s initiative in the broader context of the nuclear abolition movements that have existed since the dawn of the nuclear era. Also, it only briefly touches on the views of sceptics to the group’s agenda. It would be fascinating to read what others may think about the broad range of arguments for and against their common cause.

What might be interesting for a Polish reader, though, is that Taubman exposes the role of the U.S.’s threat-reduction initiative in improving lax security measures at the Institute of Atomic Energy (currently the National Centre for Nuclear Research) in Świerk near Warsaw.

The institute, which according to the author at some point “contained enough enriched uranium to make eighteen nuclear weapons,” is presented as a dream target for terrorists seeking nuclear material and an example of the rationale for the group’s goal of reducing nuclear risks. Based on interviews with U.S. officials and his visit to Poland in 2010, Taubman asserts that “for years [the institute] was the making of an American nuclear nightmare” (p. 58). Also, the “American-led effort in Poland … is an unusual amalgam of diplomacy, technology and bribery. Not illicit bribery, but the abundant use of American money to persuade foreign governments that it’s in their interest to get rid of their highly enriched uranium” (p. 62). The last of the spent fuel kept at the institute was removed in September 2010, and Taubman sums up the event with a comment by a U.S. official, “the impossible is possible” (p. 68).

It seems questionable whether the authors’ accounts of the problems and risks associated with Świerk’s infrastructure are fully justified and whether they are not exaggerations designed to strengthen the arguments outlined in the book.
It seems unimaginable that a serious source of risky nuclear materials had been found without appropriate safety and security measures just 30 km outside of the Polish capital. The book’s narrative is dominated by the observations of the U.S. officials and does not include a Polish assessment of the risks related to the Maria nuclear research reactor. Despite these important shortfalls, the book leads a reader to one notable conclusion: it is likely that without the $60 million provided by the U.S., the current security level of the Maria reactor would look different than it does nowadays.¹ Even though the author’s evaluations of the institute’s safety and security may be overblown, it is true that thanks to the additional precautionary measures that the risks associated with the research reactor in Świerk have been significantly lessened and shows that even remote nuclear threats receive the attention they deserve.

Taubman does not finish the story of the five Cold Warriors’ quest to ban the bomb, even though Schultz is currently 91, Kissinger, 89, Drell, 85, Perry, 84, and Nunn, the youngest, is 74. Perhaps developments in the coming years will provide enough material for another volume about the further engagement of these vigorous seniors in pursuit of their ambitious agenda.

All of the Cold Warriors express the realistic view that their goal will not be reached in their lifetime. The achievement of this goal should, however, not be treated as a criterion when evaluating their endeavour. What matters most now is whether their grand vision will continue to galvanise international support and future generations of leaders around their interim steps that, while having the distant goal in perspective, would contribute to reducing nuclear dangers.

Jacek Durkalec


Europe’s Parliament: People, Places, Politics was written by a pair of European Parliament officials and allows the reader to become acquainted with an inside view of Parliament’s working methods and the institution’s major bodies and gain a sense of the work undertaken by the directly elected MEPs. Stephen Clark who has been working for the European Parliament for more than 20 years, and Sir Julian Priestley, a former Secretary General of Parliament in


In his preface, Jacques Delors, whose oral performances on the floor of Parliament are well-recognised in the book’s sixth chapter, “The Gift of Tongues,” points to the forum’s dynamic development, which is also presented in the book. Interestingly, in times of heavy debate regarding possible further shifts of sovereignty, particularly in budgetary and fiscal policies, Delors signals the importance of the better relationship between the national parliaments and the European Parliament. Those who would expect an exhaustive presentation of Parliament’s competences in certain policy areas or an overview of how the EP’s relations with the Commission, Council or national parliaments have been shaped over the years might be slightly saddened at not exactly getting what they had expected. However, the authors may be excused for that as in their introduction to the publication they set a clear framework for their analysis. They point that “the ambition of this book is different. It seeks to describe what it feels like to be inside the ‘bubble’ and to explain some things which a more academic work might choose to pass over” (p. XV). Indeed, in discussions on the European Parliament, the human factor is often forgotten and the institution is often treated as just legislative machinery. However, one should not forget that Parliament is the only EU institution democratically elected by a vote of the EU’s citizens, which inevitably influences the MEP’s activities.

This book, as the title already reveals, focuses therefore more on the people in Parliament, their personal characteristics as well as on their closest political environment, giving fair attention to both euro-enthusiasts as well as top eurosceptics on the far right of the chamber. Additionally, everyday problems of the institution, such as the management of its properties, including a story about the collapsed ceiling in the Strasbourg building,² are also revealed in the book. The authors awarded some recognition to the EP’s permanent officials, who despite their major contribution to Parliament’s activities are often overshadowed by the MEPs (Chapter 12).

This perspective is a very different approach from the academic publications on the institutions and makes this book attractive for both those who can boast of wide knowledge of Parliaments’ prerogatives and its role in the institutional

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² Apparently the duties of the vice-presidents of the European Parliament include the very down to earth tasks like building management. For more, see: Chapter 7 and an adequate photograph presenting the Gérard Onesta checking the causes of the ceilings’ collapse in 2008, p. 216.
balance and those who are not interested in acquiring such knowledge or who
are discouraged by the EU’s complicated procedures, such as how it co-shapes
EU law or passes EU annual budget, processes often burdened by specific
Brussels jargon barely understood by everyday EU citizens. Authors want this
work to be perceived as a continuation of a previous work by Priestley, who in
2008 published *Six Battles That Shaped Europe’s Parliament*, and as such
should be rather treated as a complementary piece. However, for a better
understanding of deputies’ behaviour as described in the book, a broader
description of the European Parliament’s competences would be desirable and in
some points are missing altogether.

The authors start their guided tour of Parliament by presenting the
peculiarities of its locations: Strasbourg, Luxembourg and Brussels (Chapters 1
and 2). Descriptions of all the possible nooks and crannies where Parliament is
seated is intermingled with the issue which seriously affects its work—a need of
one permanent seat of Parliament? The authors point that keeping Strasbourg as
one of Parliament’s locations, while very costly, has been sensitive for Paris,
whose consent for increases in Parliament’s legislative powers over the years has
been requisite. Parliament’s bumpy and unsuccessful battle for a single seat,
beginning with the Zagari report drafted in the 1979–1984 legislative period to
its decision in March 2011 to compress two October sessions into a single week
in 2012 and 2013, thus eliminating an extra trip to Strasbourg, is fully covered
in the book.

Having set a picture of Parliament’s places, the book continues with
presenting Parliament’s people. The third chapter, “A Dash of Politics,”
constitutes a short overview of the development of political parties in the
Parliamentary chamber, or hemicycle, and the internal group frictions between
the national delegations. Moreover, it portrays the peculiarities of the coalition
politics of Parliament’s major political forces, including the political bargaining
concerning the election of the European Parliament’s President. With this

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2008.

4 In March 2011 in the vote on the calendar of the Parliament’s session periods for 2012 and 2013
MEPs laid down that two of the twelve monthly plenary sessions are to be held in the same week
in October. According to France that opened an action for annulment, this decision should be
considered as an Infringement of Protocol No. 3 and Protocol No. 6 on the location of the seats
of the institutions and of certain bodies, offices agencies and departments of the European
Union. See: Joined Cases C-237/11, C-238/11 in *France v. Parliament*, OJ C 226 from 30 July
knowledge the reader will better understand the specifics of parliamentary voting. In the fourth and fifth chapters, the authors touch upon the sensitive issue of the MEPs nationality. According to the EU treaties, deputies to the European Parliament represent the European Union’s citizens, but as the authors rightly point out, “accusations that MEPs are being influenced by these [national] interests, or acting according to the wishes of their respective national governments, reveal more about naïveté of the accuser than the culpability of the accused” (p. 112). One might get the impression, however, that the authors have focused on the biggest national delegations dominating Parliament’s hemicycle. Newcomers in the 2004 and 2007 enlargements and their relationship with their national authorities are given less attention in these chapters. The descriptions of Parliament’s people and their functions is interrupted by a chapter contrarily titled “The Gift of Tongues.” This chapter illustrates not only the “minority” languages campaign, noting the interesting example of the Irish language which has gradually become the Parliament’s working language even though its national parliament -Dáil -has not provided interpretation for its own members, but also presents a ranking of the best speeches ever delivered to the chamber.

The faces of Parliament are also covered in other chapters. One might ponder, however, whether the authors were successful in maintaining a balance between presenting prominent posts, their individual characteristics and possible benefits arising from these positions and a comprehensive overview of the competences associated to those significant posts. Co-deciding, for most of the EU’s policies or budgetary powers are where the Parliament often sharpens its teeth. Parliament’s legislative roles are presented in the chapter “The Sausage Machine”, by taking an example of such case studies as as REACH Regulation or Service Directive, which are profound pieces of legislation, while budgetary competences are covered in “The Money Men: Looking after the Taxpayer’s Euro.” However, Parliament’s constant political bargaining with the Council and Commission to acquire more prerogatives, evident in budgetary affairs, seems not to have been pictured adequately enough in the book. The authors could have revealed more of the backstage efforts, with the most recent examples being the negotiations on the EU’s 2011 budget and long-term budget talks. However, to justify the approach chosen by the authors, one could point out that Priestley had already covered the dynamic increase in Parliament’s powers.6

6 See: J. Priestley, op. cit.
However, a publication from 2008 naturally does not cover Parliament’s involvement in negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014–2020. Having predicted in his concluding thoughts to his book that Parliament would try to assert its right to shape future budgetary policy, Priestley, who focused more on the “austerity mood” around the negotiations, should perhaps have given more considerable attention to the interinstitutional dialogue and cooperation framework on the next MFF initiated during the Hungarian presidency. A similar argument could also be put forth with regards to the analysis of the chapter “Life’s Rich Pageant,” devoted mainly to Parliament’s external activities. It only marginally mentions Parliament’s battle in the establishment of the European External Action Service. This, however, seems to be well recompensed by stories devoted to parliamentary diplomacy (for instance, on p. 351). The last chapter is aimed at showing how Parliament communicates and in what ways its communications strategy tries to narrow the gap between the institution and the EU’s citizens.

The authors seem to have delivered what they promised in the introduction to the piece. Focusing on the Parliament’s people, their natural environment and interpersonal interactions, the book gives a sense of what is a highly vivid institution in comparison to others in the EU and thus reveals why it is called by its authors “Europe’s Parliament.” The authors, sceptical of the real impact of literature devoted to Parliament on the broader public (p. 415), have used colourful photographs and helpful guides to the Parliament’s premises to make their piece more easily accessible for EU citizens. However, while keeping this “citizen friendly” approach, the book would be more useful if it had chosen to aspire to a more academic analysis of Parliament’s place in the EU’s decision-making process. Even if the book is considered as a set of personal observations by experienced officials, which is equally appreciated in this review, references to the sources of information used to compose it would have made it much more desirable to EU affairs researchers and analysts. Additionally, an appendix in the form of separate tables, with names widely used in the book, and grouped chronologically by all Presidents, leaders of political groupings, Secretaries General or the chairs of the most prestigious parliamentary committee and others, would facilitate absorbing the information provided in the book more easily.

7 *Ibidem*, p. 204.
Clark and Priestley might be actually successful in attracting the attention of readers previously discouraged by complicated EU jargon. The experience of Clark, who is currently dealing with communications for Parliament, was of special value in building up the central message of the book. The variety of anecdotes of life inside Parliament and other tools that were used to attract the reader, such as ranking the top 10 speeches (pp. 180–190) and the glossary of budgetary jargon (pp. 289–291), enhanced this goal.

Agata Gostyńska


The systemic transitions that took place after 1989 followed various trajectories across Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), yet a number of similarities exist among the countries that successfully switched to democracy and free market economies. Among these are a unique group of states, the Visegrad countries, which accomplished these goals in their own specific ways. The institutionalisation of their external relations, opening of their economies and the prospect of EU membership were fundamental in this regard. The apparent success of transition and transformation in the Visegrad countries triggered questions about whether there is an optimal pace and sequence of reform, how to ensure the long-term efficacy of the reform process, which mistakes to avoid as well as which factors are conducive to a smooth progression to democracy and a market economy.8

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A very relevant issue—particularly in view of the Arab Spring—that has been addressed recently is whether, to what extent, and under which conditions the experience gained by the Visegrad countries can be emulated elsewhere, for instance in the Southern Mediterranean. It has been also argued in the literature—albeit often only implicitly—that history and culture played a significant role in defining the trajectory of the transformations in the CEE. Similarly, research suggests the more recent communist past pre-determined the specific model of capitalism that the Visegrad countries would follow today. Overall, the emerging scholarship on transition and transformation attests to the long-standing arguments and debates on the complexity, diversity and uniqueness of the CEE.

The rich body of literature on the variability of systemic transition and transformation in the CEE notwithstanding, several facets of these multifaceted and nuanced processes invite further analysis, whereby a broader theoretical framing of these processes is required. The volume edited by professors László Csaba, József Fogarasi and Gábor Hunya constitutes a timely and revealing contribution in this context. The volume makes an explicit effort to examine the patterns of transition and transformation in Hungary and Romania against the background of their integration with the European Union (EU). The objective of the volume is to elucidate the diverse facets of structural change in both countries that has been triggered by the forces inherent in systemic transition (Hungary) and by the prospect of EU membership (Romania). By focusing on a variety of case studies, the volume seeks to add to the still nascent theory and practice of the (political) economy of transition, and deals with questions about the historical, cultural and social aspects of the transitions.

16 Central European University (Budapest), University of Debrecen, Corvinus University of Budapest; Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
17 Partium Christian University, Oradea, Romania.
18 Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (WIIW), Vienna.
European Integration consists of five major parts, each containing three to five essays. Part One offers a comprehensive view of the process of European integration and current developments in the EU as seen from and experienced by Hungary and Romania. Parts Two to Five engage with more specific issues pertinent to transition and transformation in both countries with a significant amount of weight given to agriculture, regional development and organisational change at the corporate level as well as to knowledge-production. The strength of the volume consists of its comprehensive, unbiased and methodologically differentiated approach to the subject. Another important observation is that the majority of the authors succeed at employing a valid comparative perspective in their research, thus making their argument, on the one hand, relevant and, on the other hand, interesting to readers unfamiliar with the broader socio-economic contexts of Hungary and Romania.

Part One opens with an essay by Gábor Hunya on the economic situation in Romania before and after the global financial crisis. The developments in Romania are discussed as part and parcel of the developments in the other CEE countries. László Csaba next poses several questions about the nature of the global financial crisis and its implications for the CEE region. These apparently simple, yet highly critical questions, form the thread of a compact discussion on what Europe is about, what the limits to solidarity are, and how to conceive of the “new normalcy” in Europe following the global financial crisis. From a similar perspective, Daniel Dâianu, examines the root causes of the financial and economic crisis. In the discussion that unfolds, Dâianu dwells on questions of ethics, vested interests and the distribution of economic power and their role in fuelling the crisis. The rather broad spectrum in Part One becomes more focused in its concluding contribution devoted to Romanian rural areas and their development in the context of European integration and the global crisis. Specifically, the author, Maria Vincze, addresses the multifaceted and correlated dilemmas of employment, territoriality and infrastructure in rural development in Romania.

Part Two raises the question of the challenges that Hungary and Romania face today as members of the EU. The background of this discussion is formed by a hypothesis of the EU as a “continental state” (Gusztáv Molnár). The historical approach adopted by the author allows him to highlight the contradictions inherent in the process of European integration. It is in this context that István L. Szakáli explains the historically-determined mechanisms behind cross-border cooperation in the CEE. The variability and paradoxes of
European integration in the CEE become particularly striking in a paper on Szekelyland by Árpád Szabó. This anthropological study of the socio-economic specificities of a Hungarian ethnic minority inhabiting the centre of Romania reminds the reader that the CEE has a distinctive history and culture, and that regional differences play a substantial role in defining the paths of growth across the region.

The connection between exchange rate movements and the volume of agricultural exports has been largely neglected in the scholarship on systemic transition in the CEE, irrespective of the fact that agricultural transition forms a significant part of the transformation in the CEE. In order to address this shortcoming in the literature, in the next part of the volume, József Fogarasi develops a gravity model to estimate the impact of exchange rate volatility on Romanian agri-food exports over the period 1999–2008. Subsequently, policy-recommendations are drawn up. The question of agricultural transition is also approached from the perspective of the digital divide and its ramifications for the prospects of rural development in Romania (Zoltán Zakota). The discussion concludes with a comprehensive argument on the process of adjusting the Romanian agricultural sector to the EU structures during the Romanian accession to the EU (Sándor Elek and József Fogarasi).

A thematically different approach to the notion of challenges and prospects of systemic transition and transformation in view of EU integration is offered in Part Four of the volume. Here, the authors, including Hajnalka Fekete, Hajnalka Kánya, Dan Cândea and Jolán A. Gáspár, focus explicitly on the performance of business organisations, and specifically on the question of enhancing a company’s performance and improving its competitiveness by drawing on a number of case studies specific to the Romanian business environment. In a similar fashion, Part Five raises the interconnected issues of knowledge production (László Fekete), the role of experts and non-experts (Erzsébet Szász) and the prospects of young graduates on the Romanian labour market (András Györgybiró and Tünde Kinter). Overall, the reader acquires an informative insight into the specificities of the Romanian landscape in times of ongoing systemic transition.

Undeniably, this volume represents a collection of essays and papers that in a methodologically diversified way address a variety of questions pertinent to systemic transition and transformation in Hungary and Romania. The volume succeeds in highlighting the versatility of the issues, challenges and prospects these countries face. Simultaneously, the volume offers comparative insight into
the rest of the CEE region. The style of narration varies throughout the book, though the authors maintain an unbiased stance to issues and topics discussed. Overall, the publication grants the reader the opportunity to understand the variability of the unfinished processes of transition and transformation in Hungary and Romania. Due to the application of a comparative perspective to the majority of the contributions included in the volume, several papers will constitute useful research material for further and more detailed study on the changeable patterns of the political economy of transition and transformation in the CEE. In this sense, the volume will be of interest to researchers, academics and students who focus in their work on the mechanisms, processes, and contingencies of the transition to democracy and a free market economy in CEE and elsewhere.

Anna Visvizi
# The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs

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## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTICLES • STUDIES</th>
<th>no.</th>
<th>p.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Ian: NATO-Russia Relations: The State of Relations and Future Prospects</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bugajski Adam: The NATO Summit in Chicago: Poland’s Priorities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chappell Gareth, Terlikowski Marcin: Turkey in NATO and towards CSDP</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durkalec Jacek: NATO Missile Defence: In Search of a Broader Role</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankowski Paweł: American Politics 2012: A Far Cry from Middle Ground</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gomułka Stanisław: Perspectives for the Eurozone, Short Term and Long Term</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gostyńska Agata: The Fiscal Compact and European Union Economic Governance: An Institutional and Legal Assessment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Górka-Winter Beata: NATO in Afghanistan: An Enduring Commitment?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gradziuk Artur: The Eurozone Crisis and Emerging Market Economies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalan Dariusz: The End of a “Beautiful Friendship?” U.S. Relations with the Visegrad Countries under Barack Obama (2009–2013)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kugiel Patryk: The Development Cooperation Policies of Visegrad Countries—An Unrealised Potential</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liszczyk Dorota: The European Union within the French Electoral Discourse 2012</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marton Péter: The Sources of Visegrad Conduct: A Comparative Analysis of V4 Foreign Policy-making</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Piotrowski Marcin Andrzej: Iran’s Ballistic Missile Ambitions, Capabilities and Threat: An Overview of Available Information and Estimates 1 87

Rácz András: The Greatest Common Divisor: Russia’s Role in Visegrad Foreign Policies 4 32

Rotfeld Adam Daniel: NATO 2020: In Search of a Security Community 1 29

Rusu Octavian: Russia and the West: What are the Implications of Putin’s Return to the Presidency of Russia? 3 44

Šedivý Jiří, Svobodová Eva: Czech Expectations for the Chicago Summit 1 7

Sobják Anita: Rethinking the Future of the Visegrad Group at a Time of Heated Debate on the Future of the EU 4 122

Strážay Tomáš: Visegrad Four and the Western Balkans: A Group Perspective 4 52


Turkowski Andrzej, Ćwiek-Karpowicz Jarosław: Russia’s Foreign Policy after the Presidential Elections: Prospects for Cooperation with the West 3 72

Wiśniewski Bartosz: The U.S. Presidential Election, Europe and the Future of U.S. European Relations: More Than Meets the Eye 3 5

Zaborowski Marcin: NATO at the Crossroads 1 5

REVIEWS • NOTES

Balcer Adam, Petrov Nikolay: The Future of Russia: Modernization or Decline? (Anna Maria Dyner) 3 116

Clark Stephen, Priestley Julian: Europe’s Parliament: People, Places, Politics (Agata Gostyńska) 4 144

Csaba László, Fogarasi József, Hunya Gábor: European Integration: First Experiences and Future Challenges (Anna Visvizi) 4 149

Gnesotto Nicole: Przyszłość Europy strategicznej (Does Europe have a strategic future?) (Anna Zielińska-Rakowicz) 2 94
Jenkins Gareth: Political Islam in Turkey: Running West, Heading East? (Karol Kujawa) 1 161
Karbalevich Valery: Alaksandr Lukashenko: Politicheskiy portret (Alexander Lukashenko: A Political Portrait) (Anna Dyner) 1 165
Kurzman Charles: The Missing Martyrs: Why There Are So Few Muslim Terrorists (Kacper Rękawek) 1 157
Lubowski Andrzej: Zbig. Człowiek, który podminował Kreml (The Man Who Undermined Kremlin) (Igor Lyubashenko) 2 91
Martiningui Ana, Youngs Richard (eds.): Challenges for European Foreign Policy in 2012: What Kind of Geo-Economic Europe? (Bartłomiej Znojek) 3 109
Nilsson Manuela, Gustafsson Jan (eds.): Latin American Responses to Globalization in the 21st Century (Bartłomiej Znojek) 2 82
Rohde David, Mulvihill Kristen: A Rope and a Prayer: A Kidnapping from Two Sides (Patryk Kugiel) 2 86
Taubman Philip: The Partnership: Five Cold Warriors and Their Quest to Ban the Bomb (Jacek Durkalec) 4 140
Vaüssse Justin, Kundnani Hans (eds.): European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2012 (Elżbieta Kaca) 3 113
The enlargement of the European Union is among the major processes of European integration, and the Republic of Turkey is at the root of the most heated controversies among all candidate countries—one reason being that its candidacy brings into focus the problems which Europe itself is faced with. This book is about decades of Turkey’s turbulent relations with the EU (previously, with the EC) and the country’s importance for the bloc. A collection of articles by Polish writers—political scientists, Turkish-studies experts and analysts, taking up various aspects of Turkey’s internal and external policies—it offers valuable insights and projections which will be found useful not only by specialists in the field, but also all those interested in the complexities and intricacies of things Turkish.

An interesting publication dealing with important subjects, including some that are rarely taken up elsewhere. The articles discuss issues which, in varying degrees, may pose obstacles to the country’s full membership of the European Union, and they also throw light on Turkish foreign policy, which in recent years has been growing increasingly assertive. The contributors analyse successes and failures in Turkey’s relations with its immediate and a little more distant neighbours.

Dr. Andrzej Ananicz, former Polish Ambassador to Turkey

This unique and valuable collection contains articles discussing a wide range of political, economic and religious aspects of Turkey’s aspirations to join the European Union (often presented against a historical and cultural background). Some of the opinions may be found subjective, but it is obvious that most contributors have long been familiar with the subject matter, often carrying out research in Turkey in the language of its inhabitants. Almost all articles cite large numbers of Turkish sources, and this is no doubt a major strength of this book.

Dr. Piotr Nykiel, Department of Turkish Studies, Jagiellonian University, Kraków

A compendium of major issues and opportunities related to Turkey’s prospect for entering the European Union, competently presented by leading Polish researchers. Offering a broad view of the subject in a clear, readable layout, it certainly deserves to be recommended.

Prof. Dariusz Kołodziejczyk, Institute of History, University of Warsaw
Akademia Dyplomatyczna PISM

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