BIZTPOL AFFAIRS

BIZTPOL AFFAIRS

Vol. 6. No. 2.

BUDAPEST

Corvinus Society for Foreign Affairs and Culture

2019

ESSAY

BRIEF HISTORY OF V4 DEFENSE COOPERATION UNTIL 2014 : THE RIDE ON THE ROLLERCOASTER (BUT NOT EXCEEDING SPEED LIMITS)[1]

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ABSTRACT

Visegrad cooperation was established in February 1991, on the meeting of leaders of Poland, - international organization, but loosely institutionalized structure of cooperation with very few permanent elements. Nevertheless, security interests has been at the heart of it from the very beginning, since it was intended first and foremost to facilitate development of ties and gradual integration with Western structures – NATO and European Union2. However, defense and military cooperation did not develop within the Group at the same pace and to the same level as political or economic contacts.

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[1] The first section of this article is partially based on Marek Madej, "Visegrad Group Defense Cooperation: What Added Value for the European Capabilities?," *Fundation Pour La Recherche Stratégique, NORDIKA Programme*, no. 19/13 (June 19, 2013), https://www.frstrategie.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/notes/2013/201319.pdf.

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[2] The beginnings of defense cooperation within Visegrad framework are discussed comprehensively in Rafal Morawiec, "Military Cooperation in Visegrád Group," in *Cooperation on Security in Central Europe: Sharing V4 Experience with the Neighbouring Countries*, ed. Marek Madej (Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2010).

Apart from structural reasons (like limited potentials of the members, particularly in the early 90., as well as differences in their interest, needs and priorities), it was due to common for all V4 members fears that intensive defense cooperation among them could be interpreted in NATO and EU as an effort to build some kind of sub-regional alternative for full integration with western structures. Therefore, defense integration within V4 was limited to some degree because of sober political choice of the participants. Another factor reducing the intensity of cooperation was "a temptation" – felt on various occasions by all V4 states - to look for opportunities to strengthening ties with western structures individually, leaving behind less advanced partners from the group. Such inclination to "desert" from cooperation in V4 framework and to make and efforts to achieve the same goals individually was particularly specific for Czech Republic, the most developed (at that moment) Visegrad state and with most technologically advanced armed forces and defense industry. However, such tendencies were not totally alien also to other V4 countries, like Hungary or Poland.

Hence, V4 defense cooperation has developed in cycles, with many ups and lows. We could discern several stages of it. In the first stage, in early years of cooperation (1991-1997) it was not particularly intensive. Although conducted on continuous basis, it was almost entirely limited to political consultations (like in form of regular, yearly meetings of MODs) and to exchange of opinions concerning problems of regional security, particularly integration with NATO. Any significant initiative aimed at development of contacts on more technical and operational level (for example concerning maintenance and modernization of military equipment of Soviet origin) has not materialized or at least did not bring – despite official interest of all participating governments – tangible

results. Moreover, due to changing political conditions (growing "individualism" particularly of Czech policy concerning relations with the West and taking power by NATO- and Eurosceptic Meciar government in Slovakia) it has gradually lost its initial impetus. It was reinvigorated, however, in late 90, after invitation of Poland, Hungary and Czech Rep. to NATO in 1997 and the end of Meciar rule in Slovakia in 1998. Then the second, much more intensive stage of V4 defense cooperation started. This "new opening" in V4 defense cooperation was stimulated initially by the interest of three NATO invitees in improving the process of integration with the Alliance and later, after their accession (March 1999) accession, by the willingness to speed up Slovakian integration with the western structures. All that led not only to the quite effective political consultations on security and defense issues, but also to the number of significant initiatives in the realm of technical and industrial cooperation. Six different working groups have been created to develop specific capabilities and forms of cooperation (although their main task was still facilitating process of integration with NATO). Several promising projects, like establishment of joint Polish, Czech and Slovakian Brigade or common modernization programs of helicopters (Mi 17 and 24) and tanks (T 72), were then undertaken (primarily in years 2001-2002). However, almost all of them, albeit due to various reasons, have failed and ultimately were abandoned[3].

When Slovakia joined NATO and all V4 members accessed to EU, Visegrad defense cooperation again slowed down. In its third

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[3] Program of joint modernization of Mi helicopters failed mainly because of Russian refusal to grant Poland the necessary licenses (while such transfer of property rights and know how has been agreed on bilateral basis with Czech. Rep.). Modernization of tanks was abandoned due to disputable value of the modernized equipment and members contradictory industrial interests (all wanted to grant work for its own factories and facilities). Multinational brigade was officially disbanded in 2005 because it completed its task as a facilitator of integration of Slovakian army with NATO forces, but in fact it was caused by financial and organizational reasons. Cf. Ibid., 24–25.

stage of development, after 2004, V4 formula was used mainly as a platform for elaboration and manifestation of common position of Central European states in the discussions on security and defense issues within NATO and EU. V4 transformed itself largely into "sub-regional lobby", able to articulate and defend common interests of its participants in NATO and EU, although with substantial autonomy of members and their freedom to join other groups or act independently when they think that was necessary.

Therefore, after 2004 Visegrad defense cooperation returned to be strongly focused on political consultations. Ties between V4 countries on operational (expeditionary missions of NATO, EU/CSDP or "coalitions of the willing") and technical level (equipment acquisition, industrial cooperation) were much more loose and flexible – although the states often decided to participate in the same operation or project within larger framework (primarily NATO, to the lesser extent EU), it was done not as a common V4 activity, but on the basis of autonomous decisions of every member[4]. Hence, after two decades of development, V4 largely remained to be what is was at the beginning – a platform of political consultations on (broadly defined) security issues with still rather nascent capacity to stimulate technical cooperation and joint capabilities development between armed forces and defense industry of participants.

A new stimulus for V4 defense cooperation came in late 2010

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[4] For example, all V4 countries decided to take part in stabilization of Iraq, but did not organized any joint unit and not coordinated their actions. When Hungarian and Slovakian troops were deployed within the area of responsibility of Polish command (Multinational Division Central-South), Czechs decided to subordinate forces to British command. Decisions about deployments to Afghanistan were also done by all V4 countries actually separately, what resulted in their distribution into various areas and subordination to different ISAF Regional Commands. Other example could be Polish and Hungarian accession to NATO Strategic Airlift Initiative – done because of individual decisions, not due to any V4 agreement. Lastly, while Poland opted in the early 2000's for 48 F-16s from the US Lockheed-Martin, Czech Rep. and Hungary decided to buy Swedish Grippens and Slovakians stayed exclusively with post-Soviet Mig-29s. John Blocher, "Conditions for Visegrad Defense Cooperation: A Transatlantic View," *Foreign Policy Review* 6 (2011): 40–64.

– early 2011, in context of NATO Lisbon summit and its aftermath.

It was largely a consequence of budgetary difficulties caused by economic crisis and was directly linked to the introduction of the new concepts of cooperation on capabilities development in NATO (smart defense) and EU (Ghent/pooling & sharing initiative), which constitute central elements of the response of both organizations to that then "austerity conditions". Central Europeans realized that working within V4 framework, institution already established, tested in practice (although with mixed results) and – above all – recognized by NATO and UE as the stable structure of sub-regional cooperation, would fit very well to the logic of these initiatives and could relatively quickly bring some tangible (or at least visible and politically and publicly "sellable") results. That led to intensification of contacts both on political and operational level.

However, the former seemed to develop better than the latter. Political cooperation of V4 countries had increased significantly in the course of the discussion over new NATO strategic concept before Lisbon summit (Nov. 2010). V4 members were interested in stressing in the new document the importance of collective defense obligations and necessity to maintain Alliance's capability to implement them (what means also expectation for some additional reassurances for more fragile members)[5]. Later their political contacts were intensified further, at least when measured by the number of high-level meetings and solemn – and usually highly publicized – declarations adopted (see table 1). However, the actual results of these meetings were largely limited to manifestation of

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[5] It is even now a specificity of V4 defense cooperation to put a strong emphasis on value of transatlantic ties and NATO for European security. In fact for all V4 states NATO remains to be the most important security provider and guarantor for European stability, even if their political elites and societies could show "different level of enthusiasm" toward this organization. Cf. "Joint Communiqué of the Ministers of Defence of the Visegrad Group," Visegrad Group, May 4, 2012, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2012/joint-communique-of-the; Robert Kupiecki, "Visegrad Defense Cooperation: From Mutual Support to Strengthening NATO and the EU. A Polish Perspective," CEPA Report, no. 35, April 2, 2013, 2–3.

political will and enthusiasm over cooperation in V4 framework.

They also served as an occasion to formulate or explain common positions concerning some security issues, in particular on NATO and EU/CSDP capabilities development[6]. Significantly, such high-level meetings were often conducted in various "V4+" formats, with third states or institutions (i.e. the Baltics, Weimar Triangle, Nordic states, eastern Europeans). It definitely strengthened the role of V4 as the consultative platform within NATO and EU (as well as with non-EU and non-NATO European states, like Eastern Partnership participants or countries from the Western Balkans). Moreover, it helped to manifest openness of Visegrad cooperation on other actors, being also intended to engage in V4 initiatives some "attractive outsiders" – countries with significant military, technological and political potential, which could offer significant, disproportionally larger than others input and therefore help to fill technical, operational and industrial V4cooperation with the assets that V4 states were seemingly scarce of[7].

Table 1. Main high-level meetings of V4 countries devoted exclusively or primarily to security and defense related issues in

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[6] See for example: declaration *For a More Effective and Stronger Common Security and Defense Policy*, Prague, April 18, 2012 (just before the NATO Chicago summit) and declaration *For a More Effective and Stronger Common Security and Defense Policy*, Bratislava, April 18, 2013. Symptomatically, when the 2012 declaration is substantial on specific projects of capabilities development undertaken by V4 members, the 2013 declaration on CSDP, probably inspired by the relative success (at least in political terms) of the previous document, is largely limited to manifestation of support for already taken efforts within EU framework and awareness of challenges for CSDP development, but scarce in context of specific proposals for initiatives. That suggests mainly political goal of its adoption and the fact that V4 political cooperation was at the time close to the point when adding new and valuable content without developing simultaneously ties on technical and operational level would start to be problematic.

[7] Probably the most curious effort of that kind was a meeting of V4 MODs with their counterpart from Brasil in Bratislava in October 2013, during which possiblities of training special forces in jungle environment was discussed (surprisingly, taking into account possiblity of use of such units from V4 contries in such conditions). Cf. "Komandosi będą ćwiczyć w brazylijskiej dżungli," *Polska Zbrojna*, October 29, 2013, http://polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/10168?t=Komandosi-beda-cwiczyc-w-brazylijskiej-dzungli.

years 2012-2014

Place and date	Level	Format	Final document
Bratislava (Slk), 9.12.2014	PMs (HOGs)	V4	*Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the Deepening V4 Defence Cooperation*
Budapest (Hun), 24.06.2014	PMs (HOGs)	V4	*Budapest Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation*
Visegrad (Hun), 14.03.2014	MODs	V4	*Long term vision of the Visegrad Countries on deepening of their defense cooperation;* *Framework for an Enhanced Visegrad Defense Planning Cooperation*
Budapest (Hun) 14.10.2013	PMs (HOGs)	V4	*Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on Strengthening the V4 Security and Defence Cooperation*
Bratislava (Slk),18.04.2013	MFAs	V 4	Declaration *For a More Effective and Stronger Common Security and Defense Policy*

Warszawa (Pl), 6.03.2013	MODs	V4 + Weimar Triangle (Fra, Ger)	Joint statement *Cooperation in developing Capabilities, Solidarity in Sharing Responsibilities*
Gdańsk (Pl), 20.02.2013	MFAs	V4 + Nordic + Baltic states	Co-Chair's Statement (Polish and Swedish MFAs)
Litoměřice, (Cz), 3-4.05.2012	MODs	V4	Joint Communique
Prague (Cz) 18.04.2012	MFAs + MODs	V4	Declaration *Responsibility for a strong NATO*

Sources: The official site of Visegrad Group, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements (access 11.11.19)

However, growth in intensity of meetings on the highest level and development of various liaison ties between MFAs and MODs led rather merely to elaborating some postulates concerning future cooperation, setting general goals and manifesting will of making improvements, but rarely supported with coherent and "operable" cooperation programs, or even – with a few notable exceptions[8] – clear definition of specific benchmarks and deadlines for the completion of particular initiatives. In other words, V4 countries managed to show by frequent high-level meetings their determination to foster the cooperation, but revealed at the same time limited capability to elaborate comprehensive strategy or

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[8] Most important of them are two "flagship" Visegrad initiatives in the NATO and the EU frameworks – respectively CBRN defense multinational battalion and V4 Battle Group, both scheduled for 2016 (see further paragraphs).

detailed program of achieving it.

In this light, it is understandable why cooperation on technical level, aimed at creation of the new military capabilities or improving the effectiveness (military and economic) of those already possessed by the V4 states was less impressive. Although the "new opening" of V4 military cooperation in fact even preceded the growth in intensity of contacts on political level – as early as 2009 four working groups for development of specific capabilities were established[9] – the results were moderate at best. V4 countries were at the time still rather identifying the areas of potential cooperation and defining of its preferred forms and tools than formulating or implementing specific projects. Indeed, the list of areas of potentially fruitful V4 cooperation, based on reviews of national military modernization plans, was quite impressive – V4 authorities recognized as such areas like – inter alia – countering IED and explosive ordnance, individual soldier equipment, integrated command and support, battlefield imaging systems. Additionally, mainly due to Polish persistence, cooperation in training and exercises, aimed not only to strengthen capabilities to perform expeditionary operations, but also to build readiness to conduct territorial defense, started to be more substantial. That included both "exclusive" V4 actions and activities in the NATO or EU framework (like periodic NRF or Capable Logistician exercises)[10].

More developed were works on specific projects within smart defense or pooling & sharing initiative (that is in which V4 countries – all or majority of them – could even play a key role, but

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[9] These groups were devoted to: defense against WMD (works coordinated by Czech Rep.), air and missile defense modernization (coordinator – Slovakia), soldier's personal equipment (Poland) and strategic transport (Hungary). Justyna Gotkowska and Olaf Osica, eds., *Closing the Gap? Military Co-Operation from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea,* (Warsaw: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia, 2012), 59.

[10] Kupiecki, "Visegrad Defense Cooperation," 4–6; Gotkowska and Osica, *Closing the Gap?*, 60.

are not the only participants). Definitely the most significant (and most publicized) was the plan to deploy Visegrad battle group (V4BG) in 2016. After rather clumsy beginnings (the idea of Visegrad battle group was discussed for the first time as early as in 2007), the project finally started to get pace and more defined shape, also thanks to leverage associated to it as a "flagship" of military cooperation within V4. Until the end of 2013 it was agreed that V4BG will consist of 3000 troops, and Poland would be a leading nation[11]. Importantly, V4 considered then V4BG as a semi-permanent unit, potentially placed periodically (in 2-year cycle) in BG rotations schedule, with permanent multinational component on high readiness (i.e. logistics or medical unit) and answerable to various structures and arrangements[12]. Such vision of V4BG was to some degree intended to stimulate reform of the overall program of battle groups, which definitely was then (as now even more) in crisis.

There were also some additional projects in NATO or EU framework, in which V4 countries intended to play (or played already) substantial roles – abovementioned CBRN defense battalion, coordinated by Czech Rep.; NATO multinational MP battalion (with significant share from Czech Rep. and Slovakia and Polish leadership), since the beginning of 2013 certified as fully operational. Moreover, for a couple of years specifically Czech input to cooperation within NATO on capabilities (but in coordination and with support of V4 countries) had been training for helicopter pilots, what was manifested by development of HIP initiative since

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[11] Poland as a leading nation would contribute with c.a. 1500 troops (including combat element), Czech Rep. with 800 soldiers (including medical and logistics unit), Slovakia with 400 soldiers and Hungary with 350 troops. Barbora Bodnárová, "Visegrad Four Battle Group 2016: Run up to Visegrad Four NATO Response Force 2020?," *CENAA Policy Papers*, no. 6 (2013): 1, http://www.cenaa.org/data/cms/barbora-bodnarova-pp-no-9-2013-vol-21.pdf.
[12] Cf. Lorenz Wojciech, "EU Battle Group: A Chance for a Breakthrough in Visegrad 4 Cooperation?," *Bulletin PISM*, no. 39 (492) (April 16, 2013); Kupiecki, "Visegrad Defense Cooperation," 6.

2009 and launching of Multinational Aviation Training Center in Feb. 2013[13]. Several other ideas were discussed, including such ambitious programs like air policing, and more prosaic, but equally valuable projects on increasing cooperation in military education, ammunition standardization, etc.[14]. Finally, in Fall of 2013, that earlier rather loose discussions started to be streamlined by the decision of V4 prime ministers to task their defense establishments with drafting comprehensive long-term vision of the V4 defense cooperation strategy, particularly in context of capability development, as well as exploring the possibility to create a framework for an defense planning cooperation[15].

However, most of the projects discussed until the end of 2013 had serious limitations. First of all, majority of them functioned rather as vague concepts concerning future actions (like in case of cooperation on military education, joint procurement or industrial cooperation). Moreover, those actually introduced were not representing systemic approach and were not developed in thoroughly planned, coherent manner. Most of those, which were intended as exclusively or primarily V4 projects, were limited in scope and based on the logic of exploitation of existing opportunities (like in case of granting reciprocal access to training ground and facilities) rather than on long-term, strategic plan of comprehensive development of V4 capabilities. Moreover, they were mainly based on coordinative methods of cooperation,

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[13] However, in case of MATC, despite long talks within V4, solely Slovakia has joined the project (along with Croatia and the US) and Hungary is considering accession. Therefore, treating that initiative as V4 program is only partially justified. Oldrich Holecek, "Multinational Aviation Training Centre Document Signed by Four Nations," Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic, February 25, 2013, http://www.army.cz/%20en/ministry-of-defense/newsroom/news/multinational-aviation-training-centre-document-signed-by-four-nations-80184/.

[14] Cf. Tomáš Valášek and Milan Šuplata, eds., "DAV4 Full Report: Towards a Deeper Visegrad Defence Partnership" (Central European Policy Institute, 2012), 12–14.

[15] "Budapest Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government On Strengthening the V4 Security and Defence Cooperation," Visegrad Group, September 29, 2014, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2013/budapest-joint-statement-140929.

particularly on exchange of knowledge and information. What was lacking were the efforts more of integrative character, like creating common units, harmonization of functioning of armed forces (for example by adopting the same curricula in education and training) or development of common acquisition programs or practices. Highly underdeveloped was also industrial cooperation[16].

Importantly, many initiatives presented as Visegrad projects were in fact initiated outside V4 framework, primarily on bilateral basis. Moreover, in some cases – like participation in AWACS fleet in NATO (all V4 members) or Strategic Airlift Capabilities or Allied Ground Surveillance (only some members engaged) – decisions on taking part in given initiative were taken by V4 countries separately, on the basis of national interests and considerations, not on agreement on "common V4 purpose". Therefore, presenting them as an example of V4 cooperation was not entirely justified. Cooperation within V4 was neither a condition for establishing such projects or of accession of Visegrad states to them nor was crucial (even if somewhat useful) to their further development. Last but not least, many of implemented or discussed projects were not prospective in that sense that the possibilities for their further development or deepening were limited. If they succeeded, they could bring results imminently (primarily some financial savings and optimizations, like in case of exchange of access to training grounds and facilities), but would not constitute a starting point for more profound cooperation or integration. It was, however, partially

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[16] That was caused also by the fact that defense industries of V4 countries are relatively obsolete, underinvested, with limited access to advanced technologies and – with the Polish exception – rather small, privatized and economically, not politically driven. Therefore, V4 companies would prefer to cooperate rather with external partners, viewed as a potential source of financial assets or new technologies, trigger for modernization and a chance to gain access to other markets. Cooperation within V4 framework would be most probably perceived as a "second best" option, interesting when there is no viable alternative or because of fears of being dominated by the stronger partner form the outside. Cf. Marian Majer, ed., "DAV4 III Expert Group Report: From Bullets to Supersonics: V4 on the Brink of Industrial Cooperation" (Cenre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy, 2015), 7–9.

understandable in the light of domination of purely coordinative and consultative approach within V4 defense cooperation. Nevertheless, it also meant that in the realm of technical and operational cooperation V4 members focused on reaping "low hanging fruits" – projects rather easy to perform, but not necessarily highly productive or promising.

V4 defense cooperation since 2014 - in the long shadow of the crisis on Ukraine, migration and EU internal disputes

In the early 2014 defense cooperation in V4 framework seemed to develop quite well. Completing – surprisingly quickly in light of earlier experience, and thanks to smooth cooperation and engagement of all parties - the task set by Group's prime ministers on already mentioned summit in Budapest in October 2013, V4 ministries of defense finally adopted on their meeting in Visegrad on March 14, 2014, three important documents: two of more general character - *Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening of Their Defense Cooperation* (LTV) and *Framework for an Enhanced Visegrad Defense Planning Cooperation* (the Framework) - and one more specific: the *Memorandum for Understanding on the establishment of the V4 EU Battlegroup*.

Among these documents LTV was the most eminent, since it set strategic goals for the V4 cooperation (primarily strengthening European and transatlantic capabilities through regional actions) and identified three critical, prioritized areas of joint efforts: (1) capability development and procurement; (2) establishment of multinational units; (3) cooperation in the field of education, training and exercises. Regarding capability development, LTV stressed the need to focus on long term planning horizon, increased

transparency and harmonization of defense and procurement plans. Above all, it introduced the principle of examining by V4 countries possibilities of common or coordinated procurements (be it in bi-, tri- or quadrilateral formula) before their decisions concerning major defense acquisition. In addition, it declared that V4 defense industries should be involved in such activities "as actively as possible, preventing the region from turning into a mere market for global defense companies". In context of the establishment of multinational units, it accentuated – somewhat symptomatically - primarily political benefits stemmed from such initiatives (including their "highest visibility"). It also pointed at the already advancing project of V4 BG, presenting it as a manifestation of Visegrad's "vision" or "philosophy" of such multinational forces, intended to be: available both to NATO and EU (as well as other arrangements when necessary); of modular character; and constituting a solid base for more permanent future cooperation in this respect. LTV was less specific on actions regarding education, training and exercises – the document mention merely the need of increasing contacts and harmonization of efforts between V4 defense education institutions and committed all participants to organize common V4 military exercise on annual basis, as a contribution to NATO's Connected Forces Initiative. Importantly, LTV envisioned some kind of institutionalization of cooperation, obliging participants to elaborate multi-year Action Plan with the list of specific projects and initiatives, subject to annual presentation to V4 MODs and regularly updated. Such Action Plan should constitute a guideline on defense cooperation for every future V4 presidency. Finally, LTV declares also an openness of V4 defense cooperation on external partners[17].

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[17] "Long Term Vision of the Visegrad Countries on Deepening of Their Defense Cooperation," Visegrad Group, December 2014, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014-03-14-ltv.

The *Framework*, also adopted on March 14, 2014, is in fact a "technical" supplement to LTV. Apart from presenting more detailed definition of principles of the V4 defense cooperation, it envisioned establishment of V4 Planning Group (V4 PG) as a body primarily responsible for preparing and elaborating technical aspects of cooperation on defense procurements. V4 PG would be supported in its operations by Working Teams (WT), formed on *ad hoc* basis[18]. Interestingly enough, the Framework argued also for identifying a "flagship projects" for cooperation on acquisition, stressing the suitability of such solution for manifesting "both to political leadership and to the allies" the willingness and ability of V4 defense administrations to work efficiently on common projects[19].

The last document, *Memorandum on V4 Battle Group*, reiterated some already agreed details concerning this "flagship" project of V4, including its size (3000 troops), stand-by readiness as an element of EU rapid response capability scheduled for the first half of 2016, as well as a plan of V4 BG regular exercises – in coordination with NATO exercises within Connected Forces Initiative framework - starting from 2015. Therefore signing the Memorandum, although it mainly just confirmed earlier arrangements, was another step in completion of - so far - the most

[18] V4 Planning Group was shaped as an integrated defense planning body consisted of national experts on defense procurements, tasked to explore potential areas of cooperation and select the most promising and then to report on the results of its work to national State Secretaries/Defense Policy Directors responsible for defense procurements. Working Teams would be responsible for elaborating the details and specification of given projects identified as promising. "Visegrad Group Defence Cooperation," Visegrad Group, March 14, 2014, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/about/cooperation/defence.

[19] In addition to these documents, at the meeting and during subsequent months there was also discussed a non-paper initiated by Poland, in which some specific initiatives to fill-in the LTV and the Framework were proposed (including Polish suggestion of the modular armored platform for land forces as a highly promising initiative, with the potential to be a "flagship project"). Majer, "From Bullets to Supersonics," 6.

ambitious and engaging V4 project on operational level[20].

Documents from March 2014, as well as the atmosphere of earlier discussions, suggested that in context of defense cooperation Central Europeans were ultimately ready to end with intensive, but nevertheless rather initial talks on principles and general plans of cooperation, when manifesting willingness to engage in joint efforts matters for participants more than tangible results of their actions, and start real, substantial works on specific projects, with the true intention and determination to complete them in reasonable time. In other words, it seemed that V4 defense cooperation was finally moving from talking about things to do together to actually doing them. Importantly, adoption of these documents was not prevented by then quickly unfolding political crisis in the Ukraine. V4 countries, however, still manifested then, although with different level of enthusiasm, somewhat unified position on that issue, at least concerning significance of the situation on the Ukraine for European security[21]. On the other hand, substantial differences were already present in their positions regarding Russian role in the Ukrainian crisis, with Slovakia and Hungary adopting the most cautious approach and avoiding to openly blame Moscow – like Poland did - for instigating and inflaming the crisis[22].

Nevertheless, meeting in Visegrad in March 2014, instead of spurring the V4 defense cooperation further, ultimately turned out

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[20] "Letter of V4 and CEDC Defense Ministers to EU's HR/VP Catherine Ashton," Visegrad Group, April 9, 2014, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/documents/official-statements/letter-to-euhr-v4-cedc.

[21] They called all parties involved in crisis to refrain from violence and respect territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Ukraine, as well as supported EU efforts to find political solution and declared readiness to offer the reverse of natural gas flow to the Ukraine in case of need. "Joint Statement of V4 Foreign Ministers on Ukraine," February 24, 2014, https://mfa.gov.pl/resource/a6425f8b-ab28-4ca7-a449-1510811c9bec:JCR.

[22] Mateusz Gniazdowski, "The Countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe on the Crisis in Ukraine," OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, March 5, 2014, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-03-05/countries-central-and-south-eastern-europe-crisis-ukraine.

to be rather a "peak" of that cooperation, marking an end of the period of its relatively intensive (although not particularly fruitful) development. Since March 2014 actions taken by V4 states in area of defense, despite efforts to continue the cooperation irrespective to Russian annexation of the Crimea peninsula and further evolution of the situation on Eastern Ukraine, brought disappointing results, particularly in context of capability development. In spite of the base offered by the March 2014 achievements, with the exception of works on V4BG, virtually none of the initiatives already taken by V4 states in defense realm or envisioned in their numerous solemn declarations progressed significantly. So far not a single joint acquisition project has been implemented. Initial hopes for agreement on joint procurement of radar systems needed in all V4 states (such project was discussed since 2011) were blown away by the Prague decision to launch individual tender[23]. The same fate was not avoided in case of acquisition of helicopters for V4 armies, since both Poland and Slovakia ultimately headed toward individual solutions (in Polish case, however, not successful, although primarily due to the changes of preferences concerning possible suppliers after the elections in 2015)[24]. Offers to start cooperation on the new type of infantry fighting vehicle, issued by Poland several times in 2014, found rather cooling reception among the rest of the Group[25]. There were no substantial results of various initiatives on cyber-defense.

Although it was initially judged as relatively easy task to

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[23] Milan Nič, "Visegrad Defense Cooperation: Doomed to Fail or Survive?," *CEPA Deterrence Paper*, no. 6 (January 29, 2015): 3.

[24] Ibid., 2–3. It should be noted, however, that Poland, by far the biggest V4 military power and defense market, was at that moment initiating highly ambitious long-term modernization plan for its armed forces scheduled for a decade (until 2022) and worth some 30 billion of USD. However, the plan was prepared in fact without an assessment of the possibility of cooperation with remaining V4 countries on any of its central elements.

[25] Szczepan Głuszczak, "The Warsaw Meeting of V4 Concerning the Armaments Cooperation," Dziennik Zbrojny, October 23, 2014, http://dziennikzbrojny.pl/artykuly/art,1,1,8151,english-zone,1,the-warsaw-meeting-of-v4-concerning-the-armaments-cooperation.

complete, there was little progress in harmonization and coordination of works and models of functioning of national military education institutions (not to mention creation of joint V4 defense academy)[26]. Not so successful were also the efforts to cooperate on air policing, stimulated initially by the growing necessity of phasing out Slovakian Mig-29s and difficulties with finding the alternative. Although that would mean that at least temporarily patrolling of Slovakian airspace could be performed by the planes from other V4 countries, particularly Czech Republic (special cross-border agreement was even signed in 2018), and despite failure of the negotiations with Sweden on leasing of a dozen of Jas-39 Gripens, Slovakia ultimately decided to order 14 F-16s from the US, with the delivery date in 2023[27].

Therefore, currently in fact the only advancing as scheduled project is V4BG - an initiative within the framework of the EU CSDP, commonly, however, judged now as disappointing and maybe even dysfunctional in context of the development of valuable and usable European military capabilities. V4BG, with Poland as a framework nation and in strength of 3700, was put for the first time in the BG rotation schedule in the first half of 2016, with the intention to make some of its element (i.e. logistics) of semi-permanent character. Then, it was put for the second time on BG rotation in 2019 (July-December), again with Poland as the framework nation and main contributor, but with the addition of Croatian contingent. It is also agreed that the third rotation of V4BG would be in 2023. However, taking into account that EU battlegroups has as yet never been deployed it is difficult to perceive the success of V4BG as a breakthrough in developing

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[26] Juraj Krupa, "Visegrad Four Defense Cooperation: Years of Missed Opportunities," *Warsaw Institute*, July 5, 2019, https://warsawinstitute.org/visegrad-four-defense-cooperation-years-missed-opportunities/.

[27] *Lockheed awarded $800 million Slovakia F-16 fighter jet contract*, August 1, 2019, https://thedefensepost.com/2019/08/01/lockheed-slovakia-f-16-contract/ (access 11.11.19)

European capabilities or factor that should stimulate V4 defense cooperation in other fields[28].

Second promising cooperative project of V4 is the establishment of V4 Joint Logistic support Group Headquarters (JLSG HQ) – Memorandum of Understanding on that was signed in Budapest in 2018 and partial operational readiness is expected to be achieved in 2020 and full in 2023. When completed, JLSG HQ would offer support for joint exercises, V4BG functioning and could be even a platform for coordination of procurement[29]. However, only when completed.

That increasingly gloom picture of actual state of V4 defense cooperation could not be masked by the political declarations of the Group's leaders on the issue – surprisingly frequent in 2014 (two on the level of prime ministers within just 6 months, in June and December 2014) – in which they again stressed the importance of such cooperation as a crucial element of V4 agenda[30]. Quite the contrary, both declarations, as it was rightly noted by Milan Nić, seems to be rather some kind of "ticking the box" exercise, since the prime ministers actually discussed defense cooperation very briefly and in inconclusive way[31]. That made the words about "new opening" in defense cooperation, used in PM's Budapest Declaration from June 2014, sound somewhat ironically. Also meetings in following years, relatively frequent and quite often devoted to security and defense issues, did not bring tangible results in context of defense cooperation like joint projects on

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[28] Magdalena Kowalska-Sendek, "Unijny dyżur grupy bojowej V4 w 2023 roku," *Polska Zbrojna*, March 19, 2019, http://www.polska-zbrojna.pl/home/articleshow/27846.

[29] Krupa, "Visegrad Four Defense Cooperation," 117.

[30] "Budapest Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation," Visegrad Group, June 24, 2014, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/budapest-declaration-of; "Bratislava Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the Deepening V4 Defence Cooperation," Visegrad Group, December 9, 2014, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2014/bratislava-declaration.

[31] Nić, "Visegrad Defense Cooperation: Doomed to Fail or Survive?," 2.

procurement or capability building.

There are many reasons for poor development of V4 defense cooperation since early 2014. Initially among the most important was a Ukrainian crisis-turned-conflict and Russian involvement in it. It impacted on both European security and the relations of all EU and NATO, including Central European states, with Russia. Dynamic changes of strategic reality caused by the events on Ukraine revealed and augmented deep divisions among V4 countries, what significantly weakened and slowed down their actual cooperation in virtually all areas not only in realm of security and defense. Roughly speaking, main division lines within V4 has emerged between Poland and her smaller partners on the character of response to changes in the Ukraine, particularly in context of the adequate approach to Russia. Poland has seen Russia as the main instigator of conflict and perceived Moscow's policy both as the main obstacle to its solution and the evidence (one of many) of Russian growing aggressiveness towards European neighbors. Therefore, Poland was concerned about the possibility of Russia adopting in future similar steps like in case of Ukraine aimed at other countries, some former Soviet republic in particular (Moldova, but maybe even the Baltics). Therefore, while not advocating for such actions like arms delivery to Ukraine, Poland has argued for harsh economic EU sanctions on Russia as well as increasing assistance to Ukraine, financial or other (including deepening of its own and whole-European involvement in Ukrainian security sector reform).

The remaining V4 participants, however, had been less resolute, at least in context of Russia. Hungary and Slovakia were criticizing EU sanctions on Russia almost since the moment of their introduction, judging them as measures not adequate and not effective in solving Ukrainian problem, but simultaneously

seriously damaging both for economies of particular EU members, as well as Union's future relations with Russia. However, when V4 members' defense policies as such were concerned, differences between them seem to be less profound, what was evidenced during NATO Newport Summit. Although, contrary to the previous meeting of that kind (Chicago 2012), V4 members were unable to issue joint statement before the summit, ultimately they supported main decisions of the allies, agreeing both on the necessity of strengthening NATO presence in the Eastern Flank as well as measures adopted for that purpose[32].

Economic interests of particular Visegrad states are most frequently presented as a main reason for the differences among them concerning their (and EU) approach towards Russia after Ukrainian crisis. For small, but highly export-oriented economies of Slovakia, Czech Rep. and – although to somewhat lesser extent – Hungary, Russian market was really important, especially after the global economic crisis and not fully completed recovery from it[33]. Moreover, profound dependency of Hungary and Slovakia on energy (oil and gas) deliveries from Russia by pipelines through Ukrainian territory (sustainability and continuity of which could be threatened by protracted unrest or frozen conflict on the Eastern Ukraine) also had to have an impact on their policies. In addition,

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[32] Jakub Groszkowski, Mateusz Gniazdowski, and Andrzej Sadecki, "A Visegrad Cacophony over the Conflict between Russia and Ukraine," *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, September 10, 2014, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2014-09-10/a-visegrad-cacophony-over-conflict-between-russia-and-ukraine.

[33] Czech export to Russia more than doubled (130% of growth) since 2009, although still constitute merely 3,7% of the Czech export in total. Nevertheless, Prague has perceived Russian market as highly promising, especially in context of their heavy and machinery industry. At the same time in the Czech Rep. there were serious fears of being replaced permanently on Russian markets by Chinese companies due to to EU sanctions and Russian countersanctions. Similar view on costs (actual and potential) of economic embargoes on Russia was common in Slovakia, particularly in context of their machinery industry (lathes) and agriculture. For Poland and Hungary, although Russia was important market particularly for their agriculture products (meat, fruits), the economic embargoes were slightly less disruptive. Cf. Jakub Groszkowski, "Polityka Czech wobec Rosji – biznes i wartości," *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, June 11, 2014, https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2014-06-11/polityka-czech-wobec-rosji-biznes-i-wartosci; Groszkowski, Gniazdowski, and Sadecki, "A Visegrad Cacophony."

Hungary was a strong proponent of Russian-led project of South Stream pipeline until the very moment of its cancellation in the end of 2014, and finalized a contract – despite some European Commission reservations – with Russian company Rosatom (based on intergovernmental agreement of cooperation) on expansion on its only-nuclear energy plant in Paks.[34]

Obviously, all that differences in interests among Visegrad countries and their political leaders were quite skillfully exploited by Russian authorities, who mastered "divide and rule" principle in the relations with V4 members. While V4 joint activities, and specifically its defense cooperation, were generally depreciated in Russian propaganda[35], in relations with particular Visegrad capitals Russian approach was more nuanced, with the "sticks" offered to "recalcitrant" like Poland[36] and carrots given to more "sympathetic" partners like Hungary[37]. However, such moves weakened internal cohesion and functioning of Visegrad Group as such, so in fact they were not focused specifically on paralyzing its defense cooperation, even if such results would be welcomed in

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[34] "Paks Expansion Project Gets Contract Boost," *World Nuclear News*, December 9, 2014, https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NN-Paks-expansion-project-gets-contract-boost-9121401.html.

[35] Some examples of that kind of "strategic communication" could be found on Russia-financed website Sputniknews, published in Polish. See for example: Gajane Chanowa, "Do czego NATO potrzebna jest wyszehradzka grupa bojowa?," *Sputnik Polska*, October 13, 2014, http://pl.sputniknews.com/polish.ruvr.ru/2014_10_13/Do-czego-NATO-potrzebna-jest-wyszehradzka-grupa-bojowa-3003/.

[36] Such "sticks" most often came in form of economic embargoes on products earlier exported to Russia or announcements of changes in stationing of Russian military equipment, including deployment of Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad (what seems now to be almost ritual Russian action in relations with Poland, repeated almost always when tensions in bilateral contacts are increasing). Cf. "Russian Military Completes Rapid-Deployment Drills in Kaliningrad," *RT International*, December 16, 2014, https://www.rt.com/news/214667-russia-drills-kaliningrad-region/.

[37] The good example of the "carrots" offered by Russia was a visit of President Putin in Budapest in February 2015. During the visit the changes in contract on gas delivery between Russia and Hungary (like abolition of take-or-pay clause), were announced. Andrzej Sadecki, "Putin in Budapest – Overcoming Isolation," *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, February 18, 2015, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-02-18/putin-budapest-overcoming-isolation.

Moscow[38].

Nevertheless, even deep divisions among V4 countries on Ukrainian and Russian issues are by no means the only reasons for loss of steam in developing V4 defense cooperation. To large degree they have only augmented problems already present and somewhat inherent for that form of common activities of Visegrad states. These problems are linked to structural factors characterizing the V4 cooperation and therefore are serious, permanent and difficult to solve, eliminate or overcome. Particularly important are substantial disproportions in size and potential within V4, particularly between Poland and three remaining partners – it is worthy to mention that both Polish defense budget and GDP are bigger that respective values of all remaining V4 even taken together (see table 2). That could continuously hamper their defense cooperation, particularly on technical, operational and industrial level[39].

Table 2. Defense spending of V4 countries in years 2014-2019

	Year	Poland	Czech Rep.	Hungary	Slovakia

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[38] However, Russia's policy towards the Ukraine and European partners was not the only challenge to V4 internal cohesion and Group's defense cooperation. As a result of Czech initiative, a new formula of sub-regional cooperation – so called Slavkov Triangle (Czech Rep. Slovakia, Austria) – was initiated in February 2, 2015. Although officially not intended to be a competitor or rival for V4, proclamation of Slavkov formula caused some anxiety particularly in Poland (where – apart from alarmist and unjustified voices calling this initiative as a potential pro-Russian fraction and agent of influence in the region – some analysts quite logically asked why such cooperation was not based on already tested V 4+ format) and, to a lesser extent, in Hungary. Lubosz Palata, "Praga z Wiedniem i bliżej Moskwy," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 3, 2015, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75399,17344411,Praga_z_Wiedniem_i_blizej_Moskwy.html; Dariusz Kalan, "The Slavkov Triangle: A Rival Tothe Visegrad Group?," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 19 (751) (February 16, 2015); Jakub Groszkowski, "The Slavkov Declaration. A New Format of Regional Cooperation," *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies*, February 4, 2015, https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-02-04/slavkov-declaration-a-new-format-regional-cooperation.
[39] For more see Madej, "Visegrad Group Defense Cooperation."

Defense expenditure (milion USD)*	2014	10 104	1 975	1 210	997
Def. exp. as a GDP share		1.85	0.95	0.86	0.99
GDP (billion USD)*		460	177	119	84
Defense expenditure (milion USD)*	2015	10 596	1 921	1 132	986
Def. exp. as a GDP share		2.22	1.03	0.92	1.12
GDP*		478	187	123	88
Defense expenditure (milion USD)*	2016	9 405	1 866	1 289	1 003
Def. exp. as a GDP share		1.99	0.96	1.02	1.12
GDP*		492	191	126	91
Defense expenditure (milion USD)*	2017	9 938	2 255	1 468	1 053
Def. exp. as a GDP share		1.89	1.04	1.05	1.10
GDP		516	200	131	93
Defense expenditure		11 856	2 746	1 791	1 297

(milion USD)*	2018**				
Def. exp. as a GDP share		2.02	1.12	1.15	1.22
GDP		542	206	138	97
Defense expenditure (milion USD)*	2019**	11 971	2 969	2 080	1 905
Def. exp. as a GDP share		2.01	1.19	1.21	1.74
GDP		565	211	143	101

* - Constant 2015 prices and exchange rates

** - Estimates

Source: "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2012–2019), Communique PR/CP(2019)069," NATO, June 25, 2019, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/2019062 5_PR2019-069-EN.pdf.

Moreover, despite some positive changes in light of Ukrainian crisis and pledges already done on NATO Newport summit, financial resources available for V4 cooperation would remain rather limited in scale, since growth of military budgets announced in the aftermath of Newport summit by respective governments (excluding Poland) are modest at best. Although Poland increased its defense spending above the required by NATO level of 2 % of GDP as early as in 2015 (although later not always managing to maintain that), other V4 countries were not so determined. Obviously, while their current military spending are much lower than Polish, for them matching the benchmark of 2 % of GDP (even if formulated in Newport as an intended, not

obligatory goal for allies) is by far more demanding task. Nevertheless, leaders of all V4 countries promise to increase military spending, although in the pace that rather exclude reaching NATO expected level as scheduled (or even at all) [40]. Although such situation could stimulate search for some joint efforts as – at least potentially – more economically efficient, it raise also the questions concerning determination of particularly three smaller V4 members in their efforts to transform Visegrad into truly ambitious and effective platform for defense cooperation.

Important was also intensification of cooperation within NATO and – although it happened somewhat later – and EU, what exposed the divergent security interests and priorities of V4 countries. Although immediately after Newport summit all V4 states seemed to fully support NATO focus on strengthening Eastern Flank and manifested willingness to engage seriously in this process (for example, all V4 states except Czech Rep. relatively quickly – until September 2015 - established on its territories so called NFIU's – NATO Force Integration Units[41]), in the aftermath of Warsaw NATO summit substantial differences in priorities and determination in that context started to be more visible. Poland focuses strongly on strengthening NATO Eastern Flank further, particularly through – initiated in part by Warsaw – Enhanced Forward Presence[42] as well as expanding NATO command structure on its territory (enlargement of already existing Multinational Corps North East – MNC NE in Szczecin,

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[40] Groszkowski, Gniazdowski, and Sadecki, "A Visegrad Cacophony."

[41] "NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) Activated Today in Six Allied Nations," U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, September 2, 2015, https://nato.usmission.gov/nato-force-integration-units-nfiu-activated-today-in-six-allied-nations/.

[42] Enhanced Forward Presence is NATO initiative established at NATO Warsaw Summit in July 2016, with the intention to strengthen NATO deterrence and defense capability and readiness in the eastern part of treaty area by deploying on continuous rotational basis four multinational battalion-size battlegroups to four Eastern Flank allies (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland). For more see "Enhanced Forward Presence," NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, accessed November 20, 2019, https://shape.nato.int/efp.

establishment of additional Multinational Division North East –
MND NE in Elbląg). The remaining V4 participants, however,
although engaged in EFP and other NATO initiatives to develop
the Alliance's deterrence and defense capability and readiness in
the East of the treaty area[43], do not show similar determination.
That was pretty understandable, taking into account differences in
their threat perceptions (Poland strongly focused on challenges
posed by Russia, including its military potential; Hungarians and
Slovakians more preoccupied with the irregular migration and
Czechs as the least threatened by external problems of all V4
countries)[44]. In such circumstances Polish recent focus on
cooperation rather than V4 countries with its NATO allies from the
North East (particularly the Baltics) or – to lesser extent – with
Romania (also interested in strengthening NATO deterrence in
Eastern Europe, through so called tailored Enhanced Presence) is
hardly surprising.

Another potential stimulus for V4 defense cooperation,
which ultimately proved rather weaknesses of it, was triggering of
PESCO initiative within the CSDP framework in late 2017. It was
a chance to reinvigorate sub-regional cooperation on defense issues
within Europe and in fact it was even expected that V4 – so vocal
and tough as a group on EU forums as far as immigration issues
were discussed – would also be interested to demonstrate its
cohesion by igniting some new projects of industrial cooperation or
in capacity building through more efficient use of existing
resources. However, with particularly Poland (and to lesser extent

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[43] As for July 2019, Poland, Czech Rep. and Slovakia has deployed troops to Canada-led
battlegroup in Latvia, Poland is hosting and participating in the US-led battlegroup and Czech
Rep has troops in Lithuania-based battlegroup led by Germans. Hungarians are absent from
current rotation of EFP, although have contributed to previous ones. "NATO's Enhanced
Forward Presence," NATO Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, July 2019,
https://shape.nato.int/resources/site16187/General/factsheets/factsheet_efp_en.pdf.
[44] Read more in Šárka Kolmašová, "Competing Norms and Strategic Visions: A Critical
Appraisal of V4 Security Potential," *Europe-Asia Studies* 71, no. 2 (February 7, 2019): 225–48,
https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1562045.

Hungary) joining PESCO at the very last hour and significantly reserved towards the initiative, it was hard to develop clear "V4 agenda" within it. Hence, the only PESCO project that all V4 members are currently participating is Military Mobility (but in this program almost all PESCO countries are involved) and none of those projects within PESCO that are led by V4 member (i.e. EuroArtillery - indirect fire support – led by Slovakia, SOF medical training center led by Poland or on electronic warfare capabilities led by Czech Rep.) were even designed to be a platform for joint V4 effort[45]. So the case of PESCO shows very well the actual, not declaratory state of defense cooperation and internal cohesion in the group.

Summing up, after almost 30 years of its evolution, defense cooperation within the V4 framework could be assessed as successful only by strong optimists. Despite multiple declarations of the leaders of Visegrad countries, the profound rhetoric they have used and most probably good, sincere intentions of all participants, this cooperation still lacks substance and did not lead neither to establishment of permanent mechanisms or infrastructure of cooperation, particularly on the level of industry, nor to completion of significant capability development projects and useful military resources (maybe with the exception of V4BG). Moreover, even when the circumstances started to be seemingly more conducive for development of defense cooperation between Visegrad states – years just before and after 2014, when on the one hand new goals, plans and structures for that cooperation had been proclaimed and on the other the eruption of the crisis in the neighborhood could elevate the security concerns and change

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[45] Martin Michelot, "The V4 on Defence: The Art of Disagreement," *European Leadership Network*, June 26, 2018, https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/the-v4-on-defence-the-art-of-disagreement/; "PESCO," accessed November 20, 2019, https://pesco.europa.eu/.

threat perception of the V4 participants – it actually did not materialize. Quite the contrary, it had rather revealed both the importance of structural factors that limit such cooperation in the past as well as the scale of divergence between the interests and political calculations of Visegrad governments. Hence, although all four of V4 countries ultimately started to increase its military spending and reinvigorate their security policies, they decided to use for that purpose other platforms of cooperation (NATO, EU), not necessarily looking among the Visegrad participants for the closest partners in these endeavors. So they have deliberately chosen to keep Visegrad Group in context of security and defense issues in the same formula as in the past – as a platform of political consultations and – from time to time ‑ "the base" for common position on selected security or policy issues (currently it is mainly migration), which boost their position within larger forums (like EU), not the mechanism for somewhat tangible, more technical, but still productive defense cooperation and integration. Definitely, in was a manifestation of pragmatism and generally rational choice, but which also shows rather slim chances for a substantial change and improvement in future.

ESSAY

THE V4 COUNTRIES REPRESENTATION IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Jakub Charvát, PhD

ABSTRACT

Modern democratic political systems are hardly conceivable without political representation. This also applies to the European Union (hereinafter "EU"), a unique economic and political union of twenty-eight Member States with a directly elected and fully-fledged assembly, the European Parliament, representing EU citizens. And because the European Parliament is the first transnational representative body based on the Member States representation, the issue of its composition, and especially the apportionment of seats among the EU Member States appears to be a relevant issue. Therefore, the chapter addresses the issue of territorial representation in the European Parliament.

Keywords: European Union, V4 cooperation, national interest assertion

Given the transnational nature of the EU party system and because the representation size (number of seats) in the European Parliament does not directly affect the strength of EU Member States in the decision-making process, someone might argue that the issue of representation of the Member States is irrelevant. But the opposite seems to be true. Together with the creation of the Common Assembly in 1952, the question that arises was how the Member States will be represented in the Assembly. And as the former British Member of the European Parliament Andrew Duff reminds, the question of the size of the representation of EU Member States in the European Parliament has traditionally represented one of the most complex and sensitive issues of inter-governmental conferences.[1]

Therefore, it is not surprising that one of the controversial issues being raised about Brexit was reapportionment of the seventy-three British seats in the European Parliament. This re-opened the possibility of introducing a single pan-European constituency with transnational lists as a second tier of the European Parliament electoral system.[2] However, the idea of introducing the transnational (pan-European) lists has not been new at all as it was first suggested by the Anastassopoulos report in 1998[3] as a tool how to make the European elections more European. Since then, this issue has been regularly appearing in discussions on the European Parliament electoral reform. Despite both transnational lists, it gained significant political backing in

[1] Andrew Duff, "Finding the Balance of Power in a Post-National Democracy," *Mathematical Social Sciences*, Around the Cambridge Compromise: Apportionment in Theory and Practice, 63, no. 2 (March 1, 2012): 74–75, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mathsocsci.2011.11.007.

[2] Jakub Charvat, "Pan-European Constituency and Transnational Lists: The Third Wave of the EU Politics of Electoral Reform?," *Revista de Stiinte Politice* 61 (May 26, 2019): 24–33.

[3] Georgios Anastassopoulos, "Report on the Preparation of a Draft Procedure Including Common Principles for the Election of Members of the European Parliament, Committee on Institutional Affairs, A4-0212/1998," European Parliament, June 2, 1998, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A4-1998-0212+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN.

the most recent debates on the European Parliament electoral design in 2018, as it was supported by French President Emmanuel Macron, or the representatives of South European countries (Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain), and the proclaimed political support and recommendation from the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, the proposal was finally rejected. Especially due to opposition from the European People's Party, which was supported in this position by the Eurosceptic and nationalist Members of the European Parliament (hereinafter "MEPs").

However, it was also the Visegrad Group countries (also known as the "Visegrad Four") who have disagreed with the idea of the establishment of a transnational list as it was formulated, for example, in the "V4 Statement on the Future of Europe" at the end of January 2018.[4] Several arguments were explicitly raised for that position in the V4 Statement. And there were some more implicit reasons as well; one of them being a fear of weakening the Visegrad Group countries representation in the European Parliament, and thus expanding the already existing gap between them and the most populous EU Member States. Considering all the above mentioned, the question of the representation of the Visegrad Group countries in the European Parliament arises.

Therefore, the main objective of the chapter is to analyze the Visegrad Group countries representation in the European Parliament from the territorial representation perspective as it seeks to quantify their over-/under-representation as compared to their population ratio. The present text does not have any deeper theoretical ambitions. Instead, it employs a pragmatic approach;[5]

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[4] "V4 Statement on the Future of Europe," Visegrad Group, January 26, 2018, http://www.visegradgroup.eu/calendar/2018/v4-statement-on-the.

[5] Richard Rose, *Representing Europeans: A Pragmatic Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

i.e., it is neither aimed at defending or criticizing the current state from the perspective of various paradigms and/or theoretical concepts, but it is rather seeking to evaluate and explain the current state.

Regarding the above-mentioned, the chapter is conceived as an idiographic case study and its structure is as follows. The very subsequent part of the text is devoted to the description of how the European Parliament should be composed according to both the relevant provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon[6] and related.[7] The analytical framework for measuring Member States representation in the European Parliament at the individual level is them presented. And finally, the last part of the text concentrates on an empirical analysis of the Visegrad Group countries representation in the European Parliament since the 2004 European election.[8]

EU Member States representation in the European Parliament: the Lisbon Treaty provisions

For a long time, the EU law has not provided any (even) general principle for allocating the European Parliamentary seats among the Member States. Instead, seat apportionment has traditionally been the result of political negotiations at inter-governmental conferences, and its underlying principles have been based on the composition of the Common Assembly from 1952. Debates among the founding countries´ representatives resulted in the Member

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[6] "Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union," EUR-Lex, December 13, 2007, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12012M%2FTXT.
[7] Alain Lamassoure and Adrian Severin, "Report on the Composition of the European Parliament, A6-0351/2007," European Parliament, October 3, 2007, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+REPORT+A6-2007-0351+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN; "2013/312/EU: European Council Decision of 28 June 2013 Establishing the Composition of the European Parliament," Pub. L. No. 32013D0312, 181 (2013), http://data.europa.eu/eli/dec/2013/312/oj/eng.
[8] For the sake of simplicity, the term "European election(s)" will be used as a synonym for "European Parliamentary election(s)".

States being clustered according to population size; four seats were granted to Luxembourg, ten seats obtained both Belgium and the Netherlands, while Italy, France and Germany each occupied eighteen seats in 1952. The transformation of the Common Assembly to the European Parliamentary Assembly in 1958 (and renaming it to the European Parliament in 1962) or enlargements of the Communities in 1970s, 1980s and 1990s did not alter the underlying seat apportionment strategy of clustering; only the total number of the seats in the European Parliament and the number of clusters has increased with each new wave of the accession of new Member States to the EC/EU.[9]

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[9] The politics of clustering was attempted to change by the Patijn Report (on behalf of the European Parliament´s Political Affairs Committee) of February 1975. The Report proposed a politically impartial reapportionment procedure based on the degressively proportional representation. Other conditions for the proposed procedure included that all relevant political forces from each Member State would be represented in the European Parliament and that the new allocation of seats would not reduce the number of "MEPs" of any Member State. The Report proposed each Member State of up to a million of inhabitants being entitled to 6 MEPs and of less than 2.5 million inhabitants to 12 MEPs. States with a larger population would be entitled to at least 12 seats, and the size of their representation would increase with a growing total population as follows: Member States of up to 5 million inhabitants should be given an additional seat for every 500,000 inhabitants; with a size of 5 to 10 million, an additional seat should be given for every 750,000 inhabitants; with a size of 10 to 50 million, an additional seat should be given for every million inhabitants; and countries with larger populations should be given a seat for every 1.5 million inhabitants. As a result, Germany would have 71, the United Kingdom 67, Italy 66, France 65, the Netherlands 27, Belgium 23, Denmark 17, Ireland 13 and Luxembourg 6 seats in the European Parliament with a total of 355 MEPs in 1979 (European Parliament, 1975). However, the proposed seat apportionment procedure was not adopted finally. In a similar vein, the European Parliament considered the mid-1992 proposal of each Member State having at least six seats. Other seats exceeding this basis should be allocated according to population size so that the Member States of up to 25 million inhabitants should be given a new seat for every 500,000 inhabitants; with a size from 25 million to 60 million, an additional seat should be given for every million inhabitants; and countries with larger populations should be given a seat for every 2 million inhabitants. In the end, however, the European Parliament withdrew from this idea and it has never been applied (Axel Moberg, "EP Seats: The Politics behind the Math," *Mathematical Social Sciences* 63, no. 2 (March 1, 2012): 80, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mathsocsci.2011.10.011; Jacek Haman, "The Concept of Degressive and Progressive Proportionality and Its Normative and Descriptive Applications," *Studies in Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric* 50, no. 1 (June 27, 2017): 75, https://doi.org/10.1515/slgr-2017-0019.).

Table 1. Apportionment of seats in the European Parliament among EU Member States since 1979

	1952	1958	1973	1979	1984	1987	1995	2004	2007	2009	2014
Belgium	10	14	14	24	24	24	25	24	24	22	21
France	18	36	36	81	81	81	87	78	78	72	74
Germany	18	36	36	81	81	81	99	99	99	99	96
Italy	18	36	36	81	81	81	87	78	78	72	73
Luxembourg	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Netherlands	10	14	14	25	25	25	31	27	27	25	26
Denmark	-	-	10	16	16	16	16	14	14	13	13
Ireland	-	-	10	15	15	15	15	13	13	12	11
United Kingdom	-	-	36	81	81	81	87	78	78	72	73
Greece	-	-	-	-	24	24	25	24	24	22	21
Portugal	-	-	-	-	-	24	25	24	24	22	21
Spain	-	-	-	-	-	60	64	54	54	50	54
Austria	-	-	-	-	-	-	21	18	18	17	18
Finland	-	-	-	-	-	-	16	14	14	13	13
Sweden	-	-	-	-	-	-	22	19	19	18	20
Cyprus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	6	6	6
Czech Republic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	24	22	21
Estonia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	6	6	6
Hungary	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	24	24	22	21
Latvia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	9	8	8
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	13	12	11
Malta	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	5	5	6

Poland	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	54	54	50	51
Slovakia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	14	14	13	13
Slovenia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	7	7	8
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	17	17
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	35	33	32
Croatia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11
EU	78	142	198	410	434	518	626	732	785	736	751

Thanks to the politics of clustering similarly populous countries into groups with the same number of seats in the European Parliament,[10] the apportionment of the European Parliamentary seats has been degressively proportional since the very beginning of the assembly existence, even though the principle was not explicitly codified by the EU law for a long time. It was only the Treaty of Lisbon of 2007 that introduced the general principle of representation in the European Parliament, namely degressively proportional representation, into the EU law (the degressive proportionality principle was already included in the draft European Constitution).

However, there may be some tension at first sight between the demands formulated by the Lisbon Treaty. Article 10, on the one hand, defines the European Parliament as a body representing the EU citizens, which could imply a requirement for equal representation of citizens in the European Parliament. All the more so when the preceding article of the Treaty states that *"[i]n all its*

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[10] Yet the 1979 seat apportionment in the European Parliament brought about a relaxation of the existing practice as Denmark did not agree with the proposed number of MEPs, requiring an additional seat for Greenland, an autonomous constituent country of the Kingdom of Denmark, to satisfy the demands of the local population for their own representative in the European Parliament (Huber, 1981: 93). Finally, the Belgian political representation gave up one of its seats in favour of Greenland, satisfying the demands of the Danish negotiators. Thus, the existing equality of representation between Belgium and the Netherlands was disturbed, as well as between Denmark and Ireland, which has not been restored in the following years. Partly because Belgium has not been given the seat back after Greenland left the EU in 1985.

activities, the Union shall observe the principle of the equality of its citizens (...)",[11] on the other hand, shift attention to Member States representation. However, it does not require equal representation of the Member States but assumes a degressively proportional representation, which is further emphasized by setting the minimum and maximum number of MEPs per Member State (each Member State representation may range from 6 to 96 seats in the European parliament) while the total number of MEPs should not exceed 751.[12]

Nevertheless, the degressive proportionality remains rather an abstract concept of the nature of the European Parliament's composition that needs to be defined further. Thus, a report on the European Parliament's composition was prepared in October 2007 within the Committee on Constitutional Affairs. According to this report, a more populous country shall not have a smaller number of seats than a less populous country, but the larger a Member State's population, the more inhabitants are represented in the European Parliament, and vice versa.[13] This was further clarified by the European Council in June 2013 by stating that the average number of citizens per MEP increases with the increasing number of citizens of the Member State, and vice versa.[14] However, it needs to be emphasized that while the allocation of seats among the EU Member States may be bound by the above-mentioned rules, the final composition of the European Parliament remains the result of political negotiations at inter-governmental conferences.

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[11] "Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union" Art. 9); Art. 14 (2).

[12] The original proposal assumed a maximum of 750 MEPs. However, the representatives of Italy did not agree having 72 seats, while the United Kingdom having 73 and France 74 MEPs. At the last minute, the Italian representatives obtained a change during the Lisbon conference, which increased the total number of deputies to 751, with the extra seat for Italy (Duff, 2012: 75). Therefore, it is possible to find wording in the Lisbon Treaty that the number of MEPs "*shall not exceed seven hundred and fifty in number, plus the President*" (Treaty on European Union, 2007: Art. 14(2)).

[13] Lamassoure and Severin, "Report on the Composition."

[14] 2013/312/EU: European Council Decision of 28 June 2013 establishing the composition of the European Parliament Art. 1).

As a consequence, the principle of degressive proportionality causes a distortion in the proportional representation of Member States (malapportionment) in the European Parliament. Or, in other words, existing EU legislation implies a disproportionate (unequal) representation of citizens in the European Parliament across EU Member States. However, while EU law lays down degressive proportionality as the main conceptual framework of the European Parliament's composition, it does not specify how large the distortion may, or should be. The Council Decision of June 2013 merely states the resulting disproportion should be as low as possible (as it shall "*reflect as closely as possible the sizes of the respective populations of Member States*"), while meeting the other conditions, especially the minimum and maximum number of MEPs per Member State.[15]

The analysis of malapportionment in the European elections at the aggregate level shows that the distortion of proportional representation has stabilized at about 14 per cent[16] since the largest (Eastern) enlargement of the European Union in 2004 (see Figure 1). This is equivalent to about 105 (in 2009) to 108 seats (in 2019) in the European Parliament, occupied by representatives from the other EU Member States than being equivalent to the proportional representation.[17]

Figure 1. Malapportionment in the European Parliament elections since 1979

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[15] Ibid. Art. 1).

[16] At the aggregate level, malapportionment was calculated using the adaption of Loosemore–Hanby distortion index (1971) as recommended by David Samuels and Richard Snyder David Samuels and Richard Snyder, "The Value of a Vote: Malapportionment in Comparative Perspective," *British Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 4 (2001): 654–655.; cf. Jakub Charvát, "Poměrné sestupné zastoupení v Evropském parlamentu: unijní právo vs. realita," *Mezinárodní vztahy* 54, no. 1 (2019): 23–24..

[17] For more detail see e.g. Charvát, "Poměrné sestupné zastoupení v Evropském parlamentu."Prior to 2004, this distortion ranged from 8.4 per cent (in 1979) to 9.5 per cent (in 1984 and 1994), and it rose to 11.4 per cent only in the 1999 European elections, following the accession of Finland, Austria and Sweden (see, e.g., Ibid., 29., Figure 1).
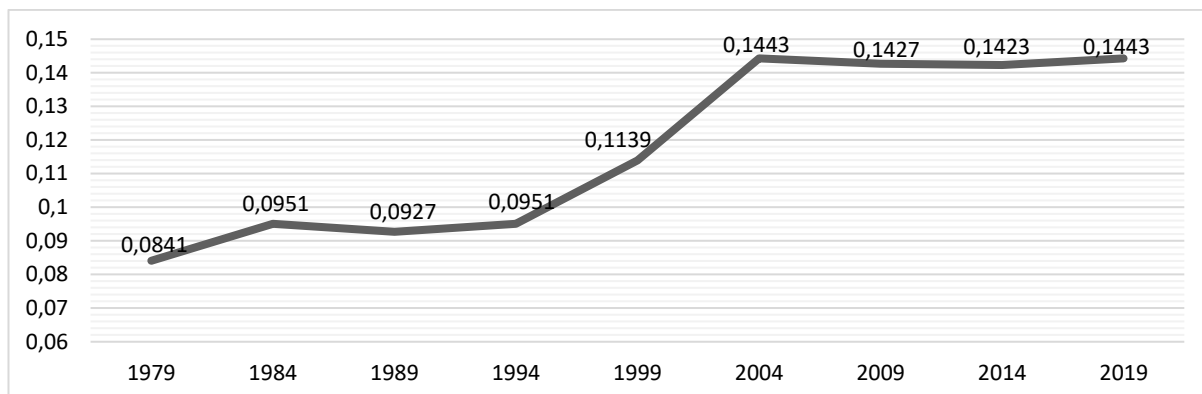
Source: author's own calculation (using Eurostat population data).

Measuring malapportionment at the individual level: methods and data

If we focus our attention on the individual level of quantifying malapportionment, i.e. to measure the under-/over-representation of individual Member States, two indices are employed. Because the June 2013 European Council Decision states that each MEP from a more populous EU Member State shall represent a higher number of citizens than an MEP from a less populous Member State, and vice versa (see above), one of the measuring tools is *the value of a vote* (*VAL*) in each Member State which is expressed as the average number of citizens in a particular Member State per seat in the European Parliament.

The degree of over-/under-representation is calculated using the *advantage ratio* (*A*), i.e., as a result of dividing the proportion of a given EU Member State population in the total EU population and the proportion of the number of MEPs of that EU Member State from the total number of MEPs. The value *A* = 1 would, therefore, express the exact proportional representation which means the EU Member State occupies the same proportion of seats in the European Parliament as is its share in the EU total population. Values lower than *A* = 1 imply under-representation of a given Member State. The lower the value, the higher the under-

representation of that EU Member State. For example, $A = 0.75$ would mean that the EU Member State only occupies 75 per cent of the European Parliamentary seats compared to the number that would apply to it if strict proportional apportionment was applied. On the contrary, values higher than $A = 1$ indicate that the EU Member State occupies a higher proportion of European Parliamentary seats than its share of the total population. The higher the value, the higher the over-representation. For example, $A = 2.5$ would mean that the Member State occupies two and a half times more European Parliamentary seats than would be the case of with strict proportional allocation of seats between EU Member States.[18]

The necessary statistical data on the actual population figures of individual EU Member States (i.e., the number of persons having their usual residence in a country) and the European Union's total population on 1st January of the year that the European elections were held, were drawn from the publicly available data archive of Eurostat (Statistical Office of the EU).[19]

Visegrad Group countries representation in the European Parliament

As the EU is largely formed by less populous countries, under-representation concerns only a few of the most populous EU Member States. Since the introduction of direct elections of MEPs in 1979, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and France have been included among the under- represented countries in the European Parliament, joined by Spain (except for the 1994 European elections) and Poland after their accession to the

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[18] Charvát, "Poměrné sestupné zastoupení v Evropském parlamentu," 24.
[19] See
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tps00001&language=en.

Communities. Thus, only six EU Member States with the largest population are currently under-represented in the European Parliament, while the remaining twenty-two Member States are more or less over-represented (see Table 2).

Member State	2004 European election			2009 European election			2014 European election			2019 European election			Member State
	pop.	VAL	A	pop.	VAL	A	pop.	VAL	A	pop.	VAL	A	
		79973	7,842			8,231			9,432	493559	82260	8,311	
Malta	399867	1		410926	82185	0	429424	71570	8			8	Malta
		75826	8,271			8,224			7,369	613894	10231	6,682	
Luxembourg	454960	0		493500	82250	5	549680	91613	2		6	6	Luxembourg
		12048	5,205		13282	5,093		14300	4,721	875898	14598	4,683	
Cyprus	722893	2	4	796930	1	0	858000	0	1		3	6	Cyprus
		22770	2,754		22262	3,038		21930	3,078	1324820	22080	3,096	
Estonia	1366250	8	2	1335740	3	6	1315819	3	4		3	6	Estonia
		25294	2,479		27035	2,502		25763	2,620	1919968	23999	2,848	
Latvia	2276520	6	4	2162834	4	1	2061085	5	4		6	9	Latvia
		28520	2,199		29033	2,329		25018	2,698	2080908	26011	2,628	
Slovenia	1996433	4	0	2032362	7	9	2001468	3	5		4	6	Slovenia
	339892	26145	2,398		26532	2,549		26758	2,523	2794184	25401	2,691	
Lithua-nia	9	6	7	3183856	1	6	2943472	8	0		7	7	Lithuania
		X	X		X	X		38607	1,748	4076246	37056	1,845	
Croatia	X			X	X	X	4246809	3	7		8	1	Croatia
		30991	2,023		37677	1,795	4637852	42162	1,601	4904226	44583	1,533	
Ireland	4028851	1	7	4521322	6	4		2	2		9	6	Ireland
		38370	1,634		41403	1,633	5415949	41661	1,620	5450421	41926	1,630	
Slovakia	**5371875**	**5**	**5**	**5382401**	**0**	**8**		**1**	**5**		**3**	**8**	**Slovakia**
		37283	1,682		40971	1,651	5451270	41932	1,610	5517919	42445	1,610	
Finland	5219732	8	1	5326314	6	1		8	0		5	8	Finland
		38554	1,626		42395	1,595		43286	1,559	5806081	44662	1,530	
Denmark	5397640	5	7	5511451	7	6	5627235	4	6		2	9	Denmark
		X	X		43924	1,540		42621	1,584	7000039	41176	1,660	
Bulgaria	X			7467119	2	1	7245677	6	0		7	5	Bulgaria
		45236	1,389		49029	1,379		47265	1,428	8858775	49215	1,389	
Austria	8142573	5	4	8335003	4	7	8507786	4	3		4	3	Austria
	1011674	42153	1,487	1003097	45595	1,483		47035	1,435	9772756	45636	1,469	
Hungary	**2**	**0**	**8**	**5**	**3**	**6**	**9877365**	**0**	**3**		**9**	**2**	**Hungary**
		47240	1,327		51442	1,315		48224	1,399	1023018	51150	1,336	
Sweden	8975670	3	6	9256347	1	5	9644864	3	9	5	9	7	Sweden
	1047305	43637	1,437	1056301	48013	1,408	1042730	49653	1,359	1027661	48936	1,397	
Portugal	0	7	2	4	7	9	1	8	6	7	3	2	Portugal
	1019534	42480	1,476	1042578	47389	1,427	1051241	50059	1,348	1064980	50713	1,348	
Czechia	**7**	**6**	**3**	**3**	**9**	**4**	**9**	**1**	**6**	**0**	**3**	**2**	**Czechia**
	1103774	45990	1,363	1119065	50866	1,329	1092580	52027	1,297	1072228	51058	1,339	
Greece	5	6	7	4	6	9	7	6	6	7	5	1	Greece
	1039642	43318	1,447	1075308	48877	1,384	1118084	53442	1,268	1146792	54609	1,252	
Belgium	1	4	8	0	6	0	0	0	0	3	2	0	Belgium
	1625803	60214	1,041	1648578	65943	1,025	1682928	64728	1,043	1728216	66469	1,028	
Netherlands	2	9	5	7	1	8	9	0	0	3	9	6	Netherlands
		X	X	2044029	61940	1,092	1994731	62335	1,083	1940165	60630	1,127	
Romania	X			0	2	1	1	3	0	8	2	7	Romania

	3819060	70723	0,886	3813587	76271	0,886	3801785	74544	0,905	3797281	74456	0,918	
Poland	**8**	**3**	**8**	**6**	**7**	**9**	**6**	**8**	**6**	**2**	**5**	**3**	Poland
	4254745	73712	0,850	4623927	92478	0,731	4651219	86133	0,783	4693463	86916	0,786	
Spain	1	6	8	3	5	5	9	7	8	2	0	7	Spain
	5749590	78791	0,796	5900058	81945	0,825	6078266	83263	0,810	6035954	82684	0,826	
Italy	0	5	0	6	2	6	8	9	8	6	3	9	Italy
	5979375	76658	0,818	6204234	86169	0,785	6435115	88152	0,765	6664711	91297	0,748	
U.K.	9	6	1	3	9	0	5	2	8	2	4	9	U.K.
	6229224	79861	0,785	6435022	89375	0,756	6594226	89111	0,757	6702804	90578	0,754	
France	1	8	3	6	3	9	7	1	6	8	4	8	France
	8253167	83365	0,752	8200235	82830	0,816	8076746	84132	0,802	8301921	86478	0,790	
Germany	1	3	3	6	6	7	3	7	4	3	3	6	Germany
EU 28	*MAL* = 0,1444 (~ 106 seats)			*MAL* = 0,1427 (~ 105 seats)			*MAL* = 0,1423 (~ 107 seats)			*MAL* = 0,1443 (~ 108 seats)			EU 28

Table 2. Malapportionment in the European Parliament since 2004

Source: author´s own calculation (using Eurostat population data).

If we focus our attention on the representation of Visegrad Group countries in the European Parliament, as this is the aim of the chapter, we can state that Poland is the only Visegrad Group country being under-represented in the European Parliament, with advantage ratio ranging from 0.8868 in 2004 to 0.9183 in the most recent European election. In practice this means that the Polish representation in the European Parliament is about a tenth under-represented compared to its share of the total EU population. Or in other words, Poland would occupy about 5 or 6 more seats in the European Parliament if the seats were allotted in accordance with the principle of proportional representation. In contrast, all three other Visegrad Group countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Slovak Republic, are over-represented in the European Parliament as compared to their population shares (see Figure 2). And this has been the case throughout the whole period of their membership in the European Union.

Figure 2. Over-/under-representation of Visegrad Group countries in the European Parliament since 2004
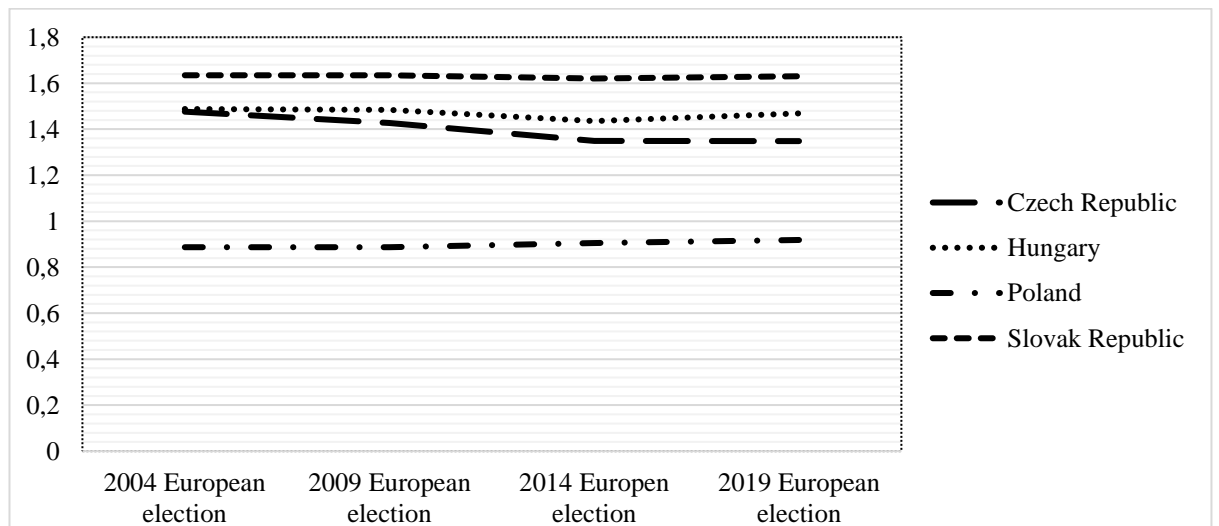
Source: author's own calculation (using Eurostat population data).

In accordance with the degressive proportionality principle, the Slovak Republic, as the least populous among the Visegrad Group countries, is the most over-represented case of them occupying about 60 per cent more seats (five more seats) in the European Parliament compared to the strict proportional apportionment. Hungary and the Czech Republic are slightly less over-represented in the European Parliament, which occupied seven more seats (Hungary) and five more seats (the Czech Republic) in the most recent European election in May 2019 than would correspond to the proportional representation (see Table 3).

Table 3. Modelling Visegrad Group countries representation: model of proportional representation (PR model) vs. reality

	2004 EU election		2009 EU election		2014 EU election		2019 EU election	
	reality	*PR model*	reality	*PR model*	reality	*PR model*	reality	*PR model*
Czech Republic	24	*16 (+ 8)*	22	*15 (+ 7)*	21	*16 (+5)*	21	*16 (+ 5)*
Hungary	24	*16 (+ 8)*	22	*15 (+ 7)*	21	*15 (+ 6)*	21	*14 (+ 7)*
Poland	54	*61 (- 7)*	50	*56 (- 6)*	51	*57 (- 6)*	51	*56 (- 5)*
Slovakia	14	*8 (+ 6)*	13	*8 (+ 5)*	13	*8 (+ 5)*	13	*8 (+ 5)*

Source: author´s own calculation (using Eurostat population data).

Conclusion

The most recent debates on possible reforms of both the composition of the European Parliament and the procedure of electing the MEPs raised many questions. Among other issues, the question of how to make the European elections more European was also discussed. And as one of the possible solutions, an introduction of a second tier of the system for electing the European Parliament (with twenty-five seats to be allocated) was proposed. The second tier was to take place at a transnational level, in a single pan-European electoral constituency and via transnational lists. A wave of criticism against such a proposal rose immediately. There were several arguments against transnational lists whereas one of them stating that transnational lists in the pan-European constituency will favour the most populous EU Member States at the expense of less populous Member States.

Opponents of transnational lists included prominent representatives of the Visegrad Group countries who publicly disagreed with such an electoral design at the end of January 2018 arguing, *inter alia*, by the threat of weakening the Visegrad Group countries representation in the European Parliament. Transnational lists have been seen as a tool on how to promote the representation of the most populous Member States. Thus, the question of the Visegrad Group countries representation in the European Parliament arises. However, the analysis showed that three out of four Visegrad Group countries, in particular, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Slovak Republic, are significantly over-represented in the European Parliament while Poland being slightly under-represented.

Considering this we can argue that transnational lists are in fact no real threat for the Visegrad Group countries representation.

Conceivably, allocating twenty-five seats out of about the total of 700 or more seats in the European Parliament via transnational lists could slightly reduce the over-representation of the Czech Republic, Hungary and the Slovak Republic in the European Parliament. However, all these countries would certainly be considerably over-represented even after the European Parliament electoral system's second tier was introduced. And if the pan-European constituency is expected to lead to an advantage for the most populous EU Member States, Poland may profit from such a reform. And even if not, Polish under-representation rate is unlikely to increase significantly. Either way, the Visegrad Group as a whole will be over-represented even in the event of introducing transnational lists for electing 25 MEPs in a single pan-European constituency.

Acknowledgments:

ESSAY

POLITICAL SYSTEM AND POLITICAL IDENTITY IN CENTRAL–EASTERN EUROPE

Baranyi Tamás Péter, PhD

ABSTRACT

The political transitions of the early 1990s are still highly debated issues of our present societies in Europe—in and outside the narrower region. Many different opinions, viewpoints, and analysis have regularly been published during the past decades and this process of self-evaluation accelerates in the vicinity of major anniversaries. The 30th jubilee of the "regime changes" provide just an apt vantage point. This study tries to find connections between the major systemic changes of the political system, their interpretations, and their impact on the self-identification of the states and citizens of the region.

From Opposition to Government

It is still debated when did those processes began which ultimately led to the collapse of socialism in the respective Central and Eastern European countries. The decision to pinpoint one of the major turning-points is generally a political choice in itself. There are several identifiable turning points who are in the race for the "critical moment" in the process. The onset of the oil crisis in 1973 figures high among those points and so does the signing of the Helsinki Accords of 1975. While the former was a major shock and an incentive for Central and Eastern European countries to become more self-sustaining, the latter is said to be a cornerstone of human rights diplomacy in the region.[1] The economic transformation of the entire Eastern bloc and its states—their increasing reliance on the West and their own productivity—stemmed from the devastating blow Soviet-type economies suffered as a result of the oil crises of 1973 and 1979.[2] In the particular case of Hungary, it is very important to note the date 1982, when the country joined the International Monetary Fund which was clearly a Western institution. IMF, and especially the green light it gave to major loans to Hungary, played a crucial part in the transformation of Hungarian economy. Not only did it drag the country to a spiral of debt but its financial tools also contributed to the market-like transformation of the whole economic fabric, especially from 1988 on.[3]

In terms of the political opposition in the respective countries, one has to add that democratic political actors have always been present in the Eastern bloc albeit the extent of their repression was not constant in time and geographical space. In the GDR, "democratic parties" continued

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[1] For views emphasizing the role of the Helsinki process see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 501–503; Michael Cotey Morgan, *The Final Act: The Helsinki Accords and the Transformation of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 1–17.

[2] Suvi Kansikas, "Room to Manoeuvre? National Interests and Coalition-Building in the CMEA, 1969–74," in *Reassessing Cold War Europe*, ed. Sari Autio-Sarasmo and Katalin Miklóssy (London: Routledge, 2010), 194–199, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203841389; Germuska Pál, "Elvesztegetett fél évtized: Gazdasági válság és válságkezelés Magyarországon, 1973–1979," *Aetas* 29, no. 4 (2014): 128.

[3] Csáki György, "Az IMF és a magyar rendszerváltás," *Tudományos Közlemények*, no. 29 (2013): 82–84.

to operate throughout the years in an outwardly democratic fashion. In Poland, there existed even during Communism a stronger sense of civil societies and unions more independent from the state party. In Czechoslovakia—apart from a short period in 1968—and in Hungary the situation was more straightforward: non-Communist political thoughts, though not illegal in themselves, were at best impractical. Further to the South, Bulgaria and Romania were even more restrictive on opposition activities. Yugoslavia, where even the party was more colorful (being a Federation in name also), most of the political dissent evolved within the party. The Hungarian case of democratic transformation was unique as a longer-term process in which "intelligentsia" took a leading role. András Bozóki goes as far as to call the period between 1982 and 1993 "the decade of intelligentsia" in Hungarian politics.[4] Certainly, though the early 1980s saw the emergence of an alternative civil society, comprised of the intelligentsia and the middle-class, ready to challenge the most absurd repercussion of the political system. For them, regime transformation was a formative period and a common democratic experience. By this time, general disappointment with the Communist regime, contributed to the rapidity of the collapse of the regimes. A situation emerged in which a moderately big layer of society (middle-class, intelligentsia) was almost invariably against the system that was defended by a thin layer of administrators and stakeholders. In the "negotiated revolutions of 1989" there existed an understanding between the democratic opposition, who viewed change as revolutionary but peaceful, and reformist Communists, who believed in the evolutionary nature of change. This has resulted, in most instances, in a very restrained form of power transition.[5]

This group in society, increasingly committed to "regime change" during the 1980s, was in turn quite heterogeneous. It included the seeds of future conservatives, liberals, nationalists. All hues of political creeds were represented with the common denominator being the democratic transformation of the political system. Before the transition, this

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[4] Bozóki András, "A magyar demokratikus ellenzék: önreflexió, identitás és politikai diskurzus," *Politikatudományi Szemle* 19, no. 2 (2010): 7–45.
[5] Adrian Pop, "The 1989 Revolutions in Retrospect," *Europe-Asia Studies* 65, no. 2 (March 1, 2013): 347–369, https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2012.759719.

diversity proved to be an asset, while it became a liability during what followed. Though it was clear that dictatorship and planned economy was to be rejected, it was still unclear which model to follow if Communism perished. There are historians who think that Western Europe exerted so strong an influence among Eastern European intellectuals that it was in fact this power of attraction that drew those countries close to their Western counterparts and eventually made them following their own brand of democratic society.[6] On the other hand, there is no denying of the fact that the United States with its different outlook on both democracy and market capitalism exerted a fierce influence, too. It was ultimately the eagerly pro-business, neoliberal approach that was adopted in Eastern Europe under an influence from English and American models.[7] However, it was not necessarily due to certain deliberately adopted policies—even though the newly formed liberal parties tended to embrace this type of market liberalism—but also to structural forces. In other words, the Czech premier Václav Klaus might have been more of a capitalist, while Hungarian PM József Antall favored a German-type social market economy, both countries had to undergo a classic "shock therapy" in economy: a radical dismantling of state property and state sector coupled with an often criticized privatization process.

Democratic opposition parties which were formed during the late-1980s, eventually found themselves in a government position after the first democratically held elections in the early 1990s. It was this middle-class power that ultimately came to a position where they could shape the foundations of the newly independent states. The route these countries have walked through were revolutionary in three senses: first, they built up a sovereign, democratic state independent from the Soviet Union; second, they managed a transition from a modern European state

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[6] John Young, "Western Europe and the End of the Cold War, 1979–1989," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, vol. III. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 308–310, https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521837217.015.

[7] Roland Menyes and Péter Stepper, "Economic Transformation of the V4 Countries (1989–2004)," in *Central Europe and the Visegrad Cooperation: Historical and Policy Perspectives* (Budapest: Antall József Tudásközpont, 2018), 38–41.

to a postmodern member of the European Union; and third, they also had to reconstruct their foreign policy identities with a heavier focus on Central European outlook.

Creating "new" democratic states

The first revolutionary change was creating a "new state". It was new in the sense that it came to be after a perceived 40 years' pause in sovereign statehood. No CEE country admitted strong identification with the earlier regime. Things were, however, not the same throughout the region: East Germany was not reformed to become a "new state," it was rather simply absorbed by the Federal Republic; while Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania saw a much more radical transition. Yugoslavia, in a process of sixteen years, was to fall into constituent pieces. Countries later known as the V4 were on a different track as they wished to accomplish a swift, quiet transition.

The first democratic elections brought about significant changes in each country. The first completely free elections in Czechoslovkia were held on 8–9 June 1990 and were won by the Civic Forum (36,2%). The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia came in as second (13,6%), while Public Against Violence came in third (10,4%). In spite of the clear opposition victory at polls, former Socialist bureaucrat Marián Čalfa remained Prime Minister. The 1992 elections were won by the Civic Democratic Party, a successor to the Civic Forum, which formed a government together with the Christian Democrat Part, with former Finance Minister, Václav Klaus as the new Head of Government. Thereafter, tensions emerged between Klaus and the group of Slovak nationalists centered around Vladimir Meciar. Klaus argued in favor of a "working federation" between the Czech and Slovak part of the country, while Meciar saw the answer in the secession of Slovakia from the Czech and Slovak Federation. On 17 July, the Slovak parliament adopted the declaration of independence of the Slovak nation, which after further negotiations led to the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia which came into force on 1 January 1991. Václav Havel rather resigned than to sign a decision with which he did not agree.

In Poland, the first round of elections, held on 4 June 1989, brought a total victory for Solidarity—out of the "available" 161 seats in the Sejm Solidarity won 160, while in the Senate opposition candidates took 92 seats out of the total 100. (Not every seat was "available" as some of them were "reserved" for the Communist party.) Out of the 299 seats "reserved" for communist nominees only in five cases was the voter turnout large enough (above 50%) to guarantee a seat in the Sejm in the first round. Thereby the non-representative vote, in spite of the restrictions and against all the odds, brought the victory of the Solidarity. Seeing the results the party leadership chose to reach an agreement with the opposition: Solidarity will not hinder Jaruzelski's presidential election, while in exchange the communists will accept the Solidarity's prime ministerial nominee. On July 19 parliament elected Jaruzelski as president closely followed on August 24 by the establishment of the new Polish government led by Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a catholic journalist. In the new "coalition" government communists and their allies held all the key ministries, thereby allowing the party leadership to maintain its political power grip. Although, the opposition managed to ensure society's true participation in political governance, On 25 October 1990, with more than 10,5 million votes (74,3%) Lech Wałęsa became Poland's first democratically elected president after World War II. The first truly democratic and free parliamentary elections were held in October 1991 which finally put an end to the prolonged Polish system change.

In Hungary, a vital step towards the path of a functioning parliamentary democracy was the so called "four times yes" referendum held on 26 November 1989. Among others, voters were asked whether the President should be elected before or after the parliamentary election (the other three questions concerned the banning of communist party related workplace organizations, the accountability of properties owned or managed by the party and the dissolving of the paramilitary Workers' Militia). In the end voters opted in favor of all four questions raised. The first completely free elections were held in March 1990. After the two rounds of voting the Hungarian Democratic Forum came out as winners with 24.7% of the votes, closely followed by the Alliance of Free

Democrats which received 21.4%. Third and fourth place was obtained by the Independent Smallholders' Party (11.7%) and the Hungarian Socialist Party (10.9%). After initial negotiations a center-right coalition government was formed, with Hungarian Democratic Forum leader József Antall becoming the first freely elected prime minister of Hungary since 1947.[8]

It seems that Hungary was the country that most radically "turned West" in 1989, while it took more time for other Visegrad countries. Changing the political elite was, however, just the beginning. How to deal with the Communist legacy was also a question. There was a duality of rationales here, as most of the old cadres of the Communist regimes were authentic bureaucrats maybe with questionable loyalty to the new state, while the newcomers were supposedly "clean," tough they generally lacked political experience. The Czech Republic saw a thorough riddance of personnel of the old regime, while in other cases it was more complicated as they tended to include most of the state bureaucracy in the new system. Though the famous Zétény–Takács Bill was introduced in 1991 in Hungary to make a clearer shift from the past system, it was ultimately killed by the Constitutional Court on the ground that it did not fit into the framework of the rule of law. In Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, a series of security clearance laws were required to confirm one's background to hold public office. This more lenient regulation had the adverse effect that charges of Communist collaboration remained an important political tool for decades to come. On the other hand, the majoritarian parties in the 2010s adopted newer measures with clearer historians' oversight to investigate similar situations.[9]

Membership in the European Union has been an issue from the very outset. Actually, the idea of Europe has been a central element in forming new identities beyond the "Socialist commonwealth" during the

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[8] For details, see Romsics Ignác, *Magyarország története a XX. században.* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2010), 381–390.

[9] For details, see Miklós Mitrovits, "A történelem kriminalizálása. Átvilágítások, perek és kárpótlás a cseh, a lengyel és a magyar gyakorlatban (1989–2012)," *Eszmélet*, July 1, 2012, http://www.eszmelet.hu/mitrovits_miklos-a-tortenelem-kriminalizalasa-atvilagitasok/.

democratic opposition period. There was a major current in opposition thinking to the effect that it was not really Eastern Europe that was in question, but a so-called "captivated West": in this sense, countries under Soviet sway were economically, culturally, and politically Western, only temporarily under Communist rule. In this framework, Russia was the East. Re-joining to Europe was not a one-way street, though: some of the Eastern European commentators pointed out that broadening European integration could revive the idea of Europe that had fallen into disinterest in the West.[10]

There was, however, a major disappointment in the European integrational process. First, the V4 countries expected a ready return to Europe—after all, Europe was a "shared vision" in the first place. They, who had been advocating a return to Europe and now rise to a governmental position, had a hard time understanding that the European integration process was first and foremost about economic and policy issues. Second, European integration and economic transformation resulted in a process where most of the countries just liberated from Europe experienced helplessness against Western interests. Third, promises about levelling European living standards in Eastern and Western countries never actually took place. Eastern Europe, in other words, could not catch up with the West.[11] In the meantime, there emerged some theoretical difficulties in "pooling sovereignty": after all, Eastern European states just had regained their sovereignty from Soviet dominance and were then asked to pool it into another supranational entity. The idea to emerge was "integrated nation-state" that in effect postulated that in a globalized world no-one can claim to be entirely sovereign so if this inevitable sovereignty-loss takes place either way, it is best to have it with close cultural and political allies. This idea was

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[10] Judy Batt, "European Identity and National Identity in Central and Eastern Europe," in *Interlocking Dimensions of European Integration*, ed. Helen Wallace, One Europe or Several? (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 248–252, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230514430_12.
[11] Bottoni Stefano, *A várva várt Nyugat: Kelet-Európa története 1944-től napjainkig* (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2015), 230–232.

worked out in the early 2000s and served well the case of joining the European Union.[12]

Even though the negotiations that led to the accession of Eastern European countries in 2004 were going on without major setbacks, it did not bring about either prosperity or stability. In fact, the Visegrad countries were experiencing major domestic political turmoil: in spite of the major capital influx, societies felt themselves stuck in the past. Poland struggled with its post-communist legacy, Slovakia tried to dissociate itself from Meciarism, while in Hungary the Socialist government brought about one of the most serious legitimacy crisis of a democratic government after 1989. The Czech Republic was more stable and more closely associated with the West. These tensions, already brewing in the years following the accession, went high gear after the global financial crisis of 2008. Its impact was disastrous for Eastern European economies and the remedy offered—heavier financial discipline, deregulation, and liberal reforms—were unwelcome in those societies. The crisis was coupled with a demographic situation where skilled, educated workforce went to Western countries for employment in increasing numbers, leaving countries virtually emptying out.[13]

So even though these countries had tailored their legal system, their economies, their political fabric, as well as their way of life to the single purpose of deep European integration, they failed to get the success promised at the outset of the process. Levelling did not occur, in fact, disparities were exacerbated by the financial crisis. It added to the modification of foreign policy identities that were forming since the transition of 1989–1990.

Foreign policy identities in the CEE region

In parallel with the aforementioned changes, new foreign policy concepts have emerged which in turn reinforced the concept of the "new" democratic state. Such changes did not occur overnight, though: after the

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[12] See for instance Nation and Integration at the Turn of Millenium Foreign Policy Review Vol.6. 2000 special issue pp.82-103

[13] Bottoni, *A várva várt Nyugat*, 232–236.

detour of almost forty years of foreign occupation and Eastern dominance, it took decades for a regional foreign policy identity to form.

The earliest attempts at the formation of a regional foreign policy concept dates back to Socialist era initiatives of which the most important ones are the Rapacki Plan of 1957 and the Duna Valley approach. The former—presumably as a Soviet ploy—gained much wider recognition, while the latter was heavily repressed by both the Soviet government and by most of the Hungarian one. The Rapakci Plan was aiming at the gradual denuclearization of Central Europe which was a regional endeavor on the one hand, but also a device in the Soviet toolkit of "peace propaganda".[14] In 1967, however, Hungarian Foreign Minister János Péter spoke in parliament about the "shared interests" of countries of the entire Danube River Valley. Such a speech in fact stirred up emotions in the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party as such a regional, "geopolitical" approach would have eclipsed the strict Manicheism of capitalist vs. socialist. Even though *détente*, and especially the Helsinki process provided more elbow-room for Eastern European countries to "build bridges," this initiative was a non-starter.[15] In fact, until 1988, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, just like those of its neighboring countries, categorized foreign countries according to their economic structure (capitalist, socialist, developing) instead of basing it on a regional basis (Western, Eastern, Southern, etc.). The very idea of "Central Europe" sounded anti-Soviet in a political space where East meant Socialist progress, and Central suggested something "not quite Eastern."

However, the idea of Central Europe predated the idea of "joining the West" in 1990. It was precisely this period when the democratic oppositions—now in a government position—tried to define their own

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[14] Maruzsa Zoltán, "Denuclearization in Central Europe? The Rapacki Plan during the Cold War.," *Öt kontinens* 6 (2008): 225–64.

[15] Békés Csaba, "A helsinki folyamat hatása a magyar külpolitikai gondolkodásra: Az európai biztonsági folyamat előzményei," in *Magyar külpolitikai gondolkodás a 20. században. A VI. Hungarológiai Kongresszus (Debrecen, 2006. augusztus 22–26.) szimpóziumának anyaga*, ed. Pritz Pál, Sipos Balázs, and Zeidler Miklós (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2006), 158, https://mek.oszk.hu/05200/05284/05284.pdf.

distinctive outlook on foreign policy. There were some major convictions, like a rejection of Socialism and suspicion of professional politics, but the democratic leaders of Eastern Europe were not united in their foreign policy outlook. Perhaps the most comprehensive vision came from Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall who "drew" there key areas for a successful Hungarian foreign policy: 1) European and transatlantic integration, 2) good neighborhood politics, 3) "nationhood politics", i.e. advocating the interests of cross-border ethnic Hungarians. For him, the conviction that a Soviet "U-turn," a return to earlier mold of Socialism could mean the end of the long-awaited changes if there would no Western security guarantee coming forth. That is why it was not only economically beneficial, but essential from a security perspective "to draw in the West," and make ourselves drawn into the Western integrational structures. As those integration did not want to import ethnic and political tensions, it was necessary to settle outstanding issues with neighbors.[16] For such a policy the Visegrad Cooperation format proved essential. This format wanted to cover the Visegrad countries from great power dominance, further the Western integration processes, and ease nationalist tensions. Originally V3 countries—Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland—the V4 with the newly independent (1993) Slovakia sought to enlarge the normative size of the region vis-à-vis both the Russians and the Germans. Not only the resurgence or a leftward turn in Russia would have meant a threat, but also German economic dominance. Even though at that time the meaning of the V4 amounted no more than mutual support for one another's integration goals and a little show of unity, it did became a central piece of Central European foreign policy.

Step by step, European integration negotiations began, nationalist tensions did ease (though not really as a result of the V4 format), and great power dominance was not apparent. All seemed good for a certain moment. Voices of advocates of neutrality—radical conservatives and radical liberals alike—did not transcend the quite homogenous

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[16] Erdődy Gábor, "'A földrajz ellen sok mindent lehet tenni, kivéve politizálni.' Antall József a rendszerváltozás nemzetközi feltételrendszeréről," in *Háborúk, békék, terroristák. Székely Gábor 70 éves.*, ed. Majoros István et al. (Budapest: ELTE, Új- és Jelenkori Egyetemes Történeti Tanszék, 2012), 115–28.

"transatlantic consensus". For a short while, it seemed that the new foreign policy identity would be a strict Western-orientation. However, hurdles on the path to integration, Western unwillingness to pace up the speed of it, general suspicion on both sides, coupled with economic hardships when the adverse side of the sudden "introduction of capitalism" became apparent, made those changes less and less popular in the coming years. Even though NATO membership for V4 countries in 1999 (in 2004 for Slovakia), and EU membership for the whole region (in 2004) meant a significant stepping stone, and did ease some of the tensions, it did not solve the problems, only halted them. In fact, the political capital of Western Europe in the East shrank from the very beginning.[17]

If there was suspicion from the outset, it turned into acrimonious disappointment in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Eastern European countries who have previously been told to follow Western lines of policy to overcome—through serious hardships—their economic problems, finally found themselves stranded with a model that seemed no longer working. By way of an antidote for crisis and recession, it was German-inspired austerity measures and budget discipline that was offered. The fact that the social fabric and the economic posture of those countries will not enable them to slip through the crisis as Germany did was wide-spread among the more radical voices of Europe.[18] On the other hand, some countries did not experience this economic downturn, and, conspicuously, the missing link seemed to be "non-Western" economics. Australia, for instance, heavily integrated as it is into Western institutions, paced up its trade and investment relations with China and became one of the major advanced economies who have basically avoided the great crisis. It was also not fallen on deaf ears.[19] A common point in the post-2008 development of Eastern European countries—alongside

[17] Judt, *Postwar*, 715–723.

[18] Costas Lapavitsas, "Germany's Austerity Plans Will Beggar Europe," *The Guardian*, December 26, 2012, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/dec/26/germany-austerity-beggar-europe-eurozone.

[19] David Alexander, "How Australia Weathered the Global Financial Crisis While Europe Failed," *The Guardian*, August 28, 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/28/australia-global-economic-crisis.

the common desire for more stable governments—was a degree of non-Westernization of their economies. It was largely about diversification and security for fragile economies who lacked the investments and economic stability when the West did not fare well. The "slow outcome" solution of the German financial center seemed not enough.

It was first Greece—particularly heavily hit by the crisis—to reach out to both Russia and China for those credits it did not receive from the West. Others in Eastern Europe soon followed suit—most notably, the V4 countries. This is how the early Antall-shaped formula of 1) European and transatlantic integration 2) good neighborhood politics, and 3) nationhood policy was complemented with a fourth dimension that was 4) global opening. New countries, especially China appearing on the foreign trade and investments horizon was beneficial for both economic and political reasons. On the other hand, it was heavily criticized for being anti-EU as it amplifies the centrifugal tendencies within the EU. However, some experts point out that it is not a cause but a symptom of those tendencies, the purposes of which has nothing to do against the European integration itself.[20] The "global opening," being implemented in all V4 countries, were connected in the major Chinese initiatives as the "Belt and Road Initiative" and the "17+1 Cooperation." V4 is thus increasingly less seen only as a cooperation to enhance the voices of Visegrad countries vis-à-vis Western Europe (which is present in the issues of migration, common budget, Common Foreign and Security Policy, etc.)—but also to provide a larger market and larger "target" for future Chinese trade and investments. The V4 countries started to act like a region when dealing with China. A major problem with that was China's approach who did not want to deal with countries on a foursome basis. For them, 17+1 is more apt as it comprises more countries, and this bilateralism (17+1) lend more negotiating power to China.[21] On the other

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[20] Richard Turcsányi, "Central and Eastern Europe's Courtship with China: Trojan Horse within the EU?," European Institute for Asian Studies, January 2014, https://www.eias.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/EU-Asia-at-a-glance-Richard-Turcsanyi-China-CEE.pdf.
[21] Tamás Péter Baranyi et al., "China and the V4 Region," *AJTK Working Paper*, December 7, 2016.

hand, the contours of Chinese involvement with the region are still unclear, trade and investment figures were increasing but not booming, and there is a lot uncertainty to the EU's responses to Chinese inroads into Eastern Europe.[22]

As we have seen, the "new countries" of Eastern Europe have stepped out of the shadow of the post-1990 world. In the years prior to 2004, the V4 primarily served as a tool to facilitate Western integration, while during the post-2008 environment, it was rather built up as a counterbalance against vulnerabilities in the West. The origins of the Eastern European of stressing sovereignty, pragmatism, global interest, and foreign trade lay with the 2008 experiences of those countries, who have learned how to use a Central European discourse and agenda to reach out to the world.

Conclusion

Not only domestic, but foreign policies are definitive in a country's identity and, in turn, identities have a major impact on both. The major systemic changes of the early 1990s were rooted in the democratic opposition movements of the late-1980s and were naturally formed and built against the Socialist system. Against this background, a new political leadership, a new concept of the nation-state and of integration emerged. Embracing Western orientation, European integration, and economic liberalization were not only economically essential but also necessary in terms of security. Though Eastern vulnerabilities against the "Old Europe" were high, it was a friendly and reliable environment to rely on. In this process, the V4 cooperation served as a vehicle to solve intraregional problems and enhance mutual integration.

This friendly and reliable European environment, a common trust in liberal market economy, and a tolerance against week executive power was over in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. Long have been disaffected by the lopsided development within the EU, Eastern

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[22] Tamás Péter Baranyi et al., "Regional Dimensions of the Belt and Road Initiative," *AJRC Analyses*, no. 2019A04 (2019), https://ajtk.hu/en/research/ajrc-analyses/regional-dimensions-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative.

European governments were now completely disillusioned by the Western antidote against a perceived Western ill. In order to diversify their relations and enlarge their elbow-room, they turned eastwards, or made a global opening to draw in trade and investments. The most important of these new relationships were those with China. The V4 was then transformed from enhancing integration to a vehicle to go beyond that and engage with China and other emerging powers. Those emerging powers were, however, less willing to use this framework in their European dealings. On the other hand, all these layers contributed to the emergence of the V4 as a common reference in European politics and a major tool for policy implementation. In turn, all of it shaped a post-socialist and post-1990s foreign policy identity that is based on sovereignty, pragmatism, foreign trade, and global opening.

Supporters

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