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COMMENTARY

EUROPEAN UNION – WHAT KIND OF EU DO WE WANT

PAVOL KUCHAROVIC

ABSTRACT

In current days, we often hear that the EU is in crisis and needs reform, otherwise this project that has successfully kept peace in Europe for more than 60 years could, in the short or long term, end its existence. I agree that the EU needs reform. But what kind of a reform? What kind of a reform do we want? Actually, a better question would be: what kind of EU do we want? Without a concrete future vision of the EU, all our steps could be useless.

REFLECTION ABOUT THE PRESENT FORM OF EU

The current crisis of the EU is neither just about the unsustainable public debt and the paralyzed economic growth from the economic point of view, nor about the social crisis regarding the insufficiently managed refugee influx. It is a crisis of our values. When people lose their values, they also lose their human faces and stop to be a human being. The same could happen with the EU. When the EU loses its values, the peace and our quality of life will be undoubtedly endangered.

What are the values of the European Union? According to the official website of the EU: „Respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law.” While we nowadays often encounter rising inequalities, politicians who do not listen to their citizens, or rules that are abused in many cases without corresponding sanctions, we act but often without thinking about the reason of these actions. In this way, we focus the future of the EU and our main attention only on economic prosperity and a way of life which is often based only on materialism and the consumption of goods and services; the anthropocentrism and individualism that have transformed into egoism, and we do not take into consideration the needs and interests of the others. The last time, when the individualist uncoordinated state politics dominated in Europe, was in the thirties, when it led to the largest conflict of mankind that had ever taken place before. No one in Europe wants to repeat again this kind of failure of diplomacy and dialogue, and we can be sure that all EU member states with its citizens surely prefer to live in peace, harmony and prosperity.

THE RISE OF NATIONALISM

The age before World War II was also characterized by the rise of nationalism, similarly to that we can encounter in Europe today. The EU's aims are different; the integration is not about to be all culturally equal European citizens with a single cultural background. One of the EU's symbols, the motto, claims exactly the opposite: "United in diversity". Nowadays, we should be able to make a clear distinction between patriotism and nationalism. While the first term means devoted love, support and defence of one's country, national loyalty and conservation of our unique cultural heritage; the other term expresses the policy of asserting the interests of one nation, viewed as separate from the interests of other nations or the common interests of all nations - basically the superiority of one's nation's interests in comparison with the others. We can learn from the history that the second approach based on the egoistic deviation of the core eternal EU values did not have positive consequences when it had been put in practice. Meanwhile, the respect for other nations and legitimate countries' interests and the mutual cooperation between nations have achieved peace and stability in Europe for more than 60 years, something that Europe had not ever known during the history of mankind. It is very important today to look to the past, to be able to learn from it and build a better future as Edmund Burke said: "Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it," and as Thomas Mann argued: "Who doesn't know the past, will not understand the future."

BACK TO THE ROOTS

Therefore, to define a future vision of the EU, it is crucial to look to the past, especially to the beginnings of the European integration. The values and pillars the European Economic Communities have been established upon are the followings: reason for justice and

freedom, solidarity, strenuousness, the spirit of initiative, love to the family, anthropocentrism, dignity of the human being, respect for life, tolerance, desire for development, trust, cooperation and peace, openness to the world and openness to the future. The idea of solidarity consists in the fact that each of us is a unique part of the community and it also supposes that each of us can share the success and failure with the others, according to the Pope Francis who said “solidarity is when one suffers, all suffer.” When politicians and EU citizens share these values and implement them through their policies, the EU will stand firmly and will get stronger than ever before.

ECONOMY – THE CRISIS OF RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Eurozone crisis stemming from the unsustainably high public debts has its causes in the insufficient implementation of common fiscal rules codified in the European Fiscal Compact from 2012 and the previous Stability and Growth pact from 1998. The rescuing of banks by the capitalisation with state resources and the expansive monetary policy of the quantitative easing of European Central Bank with the lowest interest rates in the history made the economy of the EU member states even more unstable and more vulnerable to a possible financial crisis. If the EU had stood firmly on its values such as the proclaimed rule of law and conserved also one of the fundamental principles of international law, *pacta sunt servanda*, it would be less probable that the public debts will exceed the determined level. Or, if the Schengen member states had protected their borders of the Schengen Area as they had committed in the treaties, even though it is an uneasy task (especially for sea states) and it requires many and effectively allocated material and personal resources, the European migration

crisis would not have so serious consequences and would have been easier to tackle.

MIGRATION – THE CRISIS OF SOLIDARITY AND DIGNITY

Regarding the migration crisis, we could observe in past days the proposal of the current Maltese presidency: for a migrant who is refused to be reallocated by an EU member state, this state should pay the price of 60 000 €. Giving prices and evaluating the life of the human beings by money means a very big step back and an abuse towards one of the core EU values – dignity. Of course, based on solidarity, all the member states should act in this field in order to solve this crisis. However, we are not the same, each country has its own comparative advantage, and therefore each country can be more effective in contributing to the management of crisis by its own means. Those countries with significant experience in integrating migrants may continue filling this role, while those which have enough personal and material resources may contribute to the search and rescue operations, protect the borders of the Schengen Area or establish hot spots for people in need and so on.

TERRORISM – THE CRISIS OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTEGRATION

If we maintain and put into practice the values we proudly claim (but, as we know, we do not follow), Europe would be less probably the target of so many terrorist attacks which were often executed

by unintegrated radicals from segregated communities. These people usually understand their deeds as a fight against our perceived values, which are, in fact, not our real values, but the results of their bad implementation. Actually, our real proclaimed values are in many cases almost perfectly compatible with their religious ideology. And again, this could be tackled as the result of the EU's strategy of inclusive growth and minorities' integration into a real multicultural society, where everybody respects the values, the culture and the rights of the others and feel free to say: "Yes, I am a Muslim, I am a Hindu and I am a Christian" (David Cameron).

AGRICULTURE – CRISIS OF FAIRNESS AND EQUALITY

Another controversial issue in which the principle of fair and equal approach has suffered is the issue of the agriculture and food production industry of the EU member states which joined the EU in 2004. Why did we not get the same conditions to cultivate and produce our agriculture products if we claim to build a single market with equal conditions for everybody? Portuguese or Slovak producers also need a comparable level of subsidies like their Dutch or German colleagues in order to avoid the effects of market imperfections and be able to produce at competitive prices while still being able to maintain their businesses. Why should the V4 countries' market tolerate lower qualities of food products than Western Europe?

POLITICIANS – CRISIS OF DIALOGUE AND COMMUNICATION

Democratically elected politicians are elected in this way because their voters suppose that they will defend their interests. But how do they know the interests and standpoints of their citizens regarding EU matters, if they do not communicate on a regular basis, do not enhance the dialogue and do not implement what their citizens really want? The politicians should therefore listen to their citizens, as they are elected from them, by them and for them. It is their responsibility, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, to bring only those areas to the EU level which are tackled better there than on the state level (e. g. digital and energy market, traffic or education). If these politicians are not willing to lead open dialogues, their citizens should be able to make them listen and communicate.

A BETTER TOMORROW – BASED ON EDUCATION AND OUR FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Of course, in order to be able to communicate to the leaders what kinds of improvements do we want in Europe, we as citizens should have enough knowledge of the EU policy areas and should be aware how the system works. Therefore, the support of education and maybe the idea of harmonized education systems are of key importance. As John Fitzgerald Kennedy said: “Education without freedom is useless, but freedom without education is dangerous.” Education, freedom and peace are privileges our fathers and grandfathers fought for throughout the history. Our responsibility and obligation today is to appreciate their struggle. The best way we can do it is to live with our freedom and human rights, making the world a better place for living.

Freedom basically means responsibility. Every one of us is responsible for his/her own deeds. It is only upon us what kind of a

future we will nurture. The history and recent events show us what could happen when states and citizens act on their own, promoting only their interests without taking the others into consideration, and do not fulfil their obligations. However, the past events have also shown us what we could achieve when we act together, communicate, coordinate our policies and maintain the common values. I think more than 60 years of peace and prosperity is enough to help us to choose the right way. “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing” (Edmund Burke). The future of the EU is only upon us. How will WE decide? *“As for the future, your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it.” (Saint-Exupéry).*

ESSAY

CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE PRIORITIES PRESENTED BY THE BRATISLAVA DECLARATION

WERONIKA WILKOS

ABSTRACT

The year of 1989 conveyed a major breakthrough in relations on the old continent. Simultaneously with the transformation of the political and economic development in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, there was born the phenomenon of "modern regionalism". It was seen as an attempt to overcome the existing divisions and the need to use mutual cooperation in the historical, cultural, political, economic and social similarities as well as natural geographical proximity.

BRATISLAVA PROCESS AS A RESPONSE TO A NEW REALITY

The year of 1989 conveyed a major breakthrough in relations on the old continent. Simultaneously with the transformation of the political and economic development in the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, there was born the phenomenon of "modern regionalism". It was seen as an attempt to overcome the existing divisions and the need to use mutual cooperation in the historical, cultural, political, economic and social similarities as well as natural geographical proximity. The creation of formations was the way to stabilize the situation in this part of the world, and its basic objectives were security and development. After the fall of communism, a common denominator for the East-Central European countries' decisions was integration with the western democracies within the European Union and NATO. The collapse of the Eastern bloc and its mechanisms gave impetus to the double process of integration with the political, military and economic structures of the western world. To achieve this objective, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland decided to commence regional cooperation within the Visegrad Triangle and, after the split of Czechoslovakia, the name of the Visegrad Group entered in use, including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. In the economic sphere, these countries have also started collaborating in the framework of the Central European Free Trade Agreement. Despite many differences, cooperation of those four partners is still being continued, although many analysts predicted the end of it after the main objectives were achieved. Today the group remains a precious form of dialogue and exchange of experiences, a forum for consultation on important European issues

In 2017 the future prospects of the European Union are somewhat uncertain due to a compilation of the conflict taking place. The ongoing crisis of migration, questions about the future of the common market after the British referendum and the EU's role in world politics characterized an uneasy last year for Europe. As if it was not enough, the situation is complicated by the fact that member countries do not want to aim for one goal. Each has its own idea for further functioning of the organization. “Never before have I seen so much fragmentation, and so little commonality in our Union”,¹ said Jean-Claude Juncker making it hard not to agree with him.

Nevertheless, if those 27 states seriously think about survival of the European Union as a form of integration, which does not have precedence in the history, they are aware of the necessity to establish a dialogue and find a ‘golden mean’. Thus, on 16 September 2016, the heads of states and governments of the EU members gathered informally to talk about political and practical effects of Brexit and to debate on the future of the organization without the United Kingdom. The leaders agreed on the general principles and action plan with the most important objectives for the following months. The President of the European Council, the Presidency of the Council and the Commission proposed a work program that was widely accepted by the members.

The “Bratislava roadmap” assumes some objectives in particular fields

- Restoring full control of the external borders
- Ensuring internal security and fighting terrorism
- Strengthening EU cooperation on external security and defense
- Boosting the single market and offering better opportunities for young Europeans

After the meeting, Donald Tusk, President of the European Council said: "I hope that the Bratislava Summit will lead to the renewing of trust and confidence in the European Union. This will only happen if and when people realize that we are delivering on our promises through loyal cooperation between Member States and institutions. Today I can say that there is hope."² The "Bratislava roadmap" sets out the goals ahead of the Rome meeting in March this year, when they want to conclude this process.

It must be underlined that not only did Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia participate in that summit as single states with different interests, but also they declared the Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries. They concentrate on three main issues: security, the new agreement concerning the migration crisis³ (based on the principle of 'flexible solidarity')⁴ and the common market. Thus, from the Visegrad Group's point of view, those are the priority areas over which the EU should focus when it comes to the vision of the united Europe's future. Furthermore, The Visegrad Group stresses the need for strengthened cooperation in the area of defence in the face of terrorism and international crime. The V4 calls for more efforts to implement the commitments already made in the field of security in the Schengen area and the protection of external borders. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the statement says "The biggest advantage of the EU is its scale," and "We have to work together and overcome divisions", at the same time it emphasizes the role of national parliaments.

Many experts say there is a crisis inside the V4 group due to different interests and the struggle for influence. However, those four countries of the Central Europe succeed in expressing common positions and unifying through one voice. None of them want to be on the European periphery also because of the 'Eastern Europe' stigma (which is present in the mind of the West and has a negative

connotation). In contrast to the opinion of sceptics, those states, from the historical and geopolitical point of view, share a lot. Therefore, significantly more powerful neighbours surround them resulting in a loss of sovereignty for all of them in the past. They are characterized by similarity in both internal structure and implemented outside politics. Indeed, despite many differences they want to act together in the face of the richer and larger EU members.

As a result, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia regularly lead talks to work out a common position of the region to the ongoing discussion on the reform of the European Union. On 25 March in Italy the jubilee EU summit on the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome will be held. The Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni expressed his belief that the document, which was raised during this meeting, would outline the EU perspective for the next 10 years.

Bearing in mind the importance of this event, on 2 March 2017 in Warsaw the extraordinary meeting took place with an aim to agree on a joint declaration before the Rome summit. Preserving the unity of the EU, the development of the single market, a stable euro zone, the maintenance of the Schengen area, the control of external borders, strengthening of democratic control and to ensure that the EU remains a global player – these are the main challenges facing the EU, according to the statement “Strong Europe – Union of Action and Trust”.

Under no circumstances do the attempts to stay in tune in front of the rest of the European Union members mean that the V4 countries reject merit of EU as a concept. They are just aware of their weakness and lack of card, which can play so strongly to independently exert influence on the most important decision-making bodies at the highest level. It cannot be forgotten that they

are, in the first place, beneficiaries of financial resources. Notwithstanding, while taking care of their own interests, they must also try to make their voice heard, even by the most influential governments. These factors do not minimize the breakthrough event in their history which was joining the framework of the EU. As proof, during the Bratislava summit, the Slovak Prime Minister said the Visegrad Group would never turn against the European Union: “We will have our original position, but we will not push it at the price of damaging the EU”.⁵

CHALLENGES WAITING FOR HUNGARIANS

Within the organizational structures of the Visegrad Group, every country takes over the rotating presidency from 1 July to 30 June of the following year. In 2017 this role will belong to Hungary.⁶ There is no doubt that Magyars⁷ will be responsible for the beneficial implementation of the EU reforms in the Bratislava process. Their term of office falls on the enormously important moment in the ongoing crisis inside the European Union. It is an important time to consider the expected priorities and challenges facing the Visegrad Group within the EU under the Hungarian leadership, not forgetting “the Bratislava Roadmap” and the joint statements of the V4 members.

Above all, they shall determine the procedure of leaving the organization by the United Kingdom. As follows from the consultation of foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group, which was held in Prague in June 2016, Lubomír Zaorálek⁸ expressed the need to find a way to create new relationships based on equivalence. At the same time he pointed out that that effort could not only come from the V4, but the British must perform work to be completed successfully. Further, the Slovak Prime Minister

Robert Fico in an interview with Reuters said that the Visegrad Group members were ready to veto any agreement on Brexit, which would limit the right of its citizens to work in the UK. The reality is Fico's stance is no different to the rest of the Union so the Visegrad Group can count on the support of the allies.

Another sensitive point within the EU is the issue of migration crisis. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia agree that preventing excessive immigration should be done by the significant strengthening of the protection of the external borders of the EU, as well as the increase in aid to refugees in the first safe country to which they reach. Moreover, in late August 2016 in Warsaw, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel heard due to the threat of terrorism and the need to ensure the safety of their own citizens, the Visegrad Group states would not adopt immigrants living in refugee camps in Greece and Italy. As an alternative, V4 members propose the formula ('flexible solidarity' which was mentioned earlier) that only countries that want to accept immigrants, welcome them. Those which, for various reasons, do not want to, help countries by guarding the external borders of the EU as well as co-financing funds which allow immigrants to stay in countries such as Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and contribute to the functioning of development funds (e.g. one created by the EU for Africa). This overall indicates that the proposals prepared by the V4 are likely to be adopted by all 27 member states.

The next important action that must be taken is innovation. One of the manifestations of this objective is Eastern and Central European Congress of Innovation and Innovators, which will take place on 28 March in Warsaw. According to the Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło "Young entrepreneurs know best how to remove obstacles to their activities, so they should keep in touch with the Government and law-making officials".⁹ At the congress

are invited, among others, representatives of innovative companies from the V4 countries, start-ups and non-governmental organizations. It is unbelievably important to promote new ideas and creativity because the young generation is the future of the economic development. This meeting is the culmination of the Polish presidency in the Visegrad Group and somehow sets the path of conduct for Hungary. It remains only to continue the work by supporting the development of individual units.

Furthermore, the Visegrad Group attaches great importance to the protection and development of the single market. In economic terms, existence of those four states depends on maintaining the integrity and the four freedoms,¹⁰ as well as completing the construction of the common market in the digital and energetic dimension. Taking this into consideration, the social well-being of European citizens remains the most important objective, but “social standards cannot be uniform and social progress should follow economic growth”.¹¹ To achieve that, the best resolution, according the Visegrad group, is to strengthen structural reforms, competitiveness, productivity and the single market in order to accelerate the convergence of the national economies. They postulate that every form of cooperation should remain open to all member states in order to absolutely avoid the disintegration of the common market, the Schengen area and the European Union itself. Dr Ryszard Żółtaniecki from Collegium Civitas¹² thinks Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary may push through their call for the protection and development of the single market, but it all depends on how that provision would be formulated¹³ This is a big challenge for the Visegrad Group before the jubilee summit in Rome if the representatives do not want to go back from Italy with nothing.

Another vital point is maintenance of The Schengen Agreement and control of external borders, which is closely related to the migration crisis. The group advocated the establishment of a European border guard that has been realized in the form of the European Border and Coast Guard,¹⁴ working to meet the new political realities and challenges facing the EU. It has taken important steps involving, among others, the establishment of mandatory reserves rapid response in the form of border guards and the right equipment, but also the creation of new reserves for intervention teams responsible for returns. These reserves can be mobilized to support the member states that are directly responsible for the strengthening of controls at external borders. The EU funding for the Agency will gradually grow: from 250 million euros in 2016 to 320 million euros in 2020. The number of employees of that institution will be increased from 400 people in 2016 to 1000 in 2020. Admittedly, the ongoing operations of the Guard continuously record deficits in terms of seconded staff. The EU governments must therefore endeavour to ensure that these deficiencies are properly supplemented. Thus, joint investment and commitment of the member states ensure that the Border Guard become fully operational as soon as possible and are the practical expression of their engagement to share responsibility and solidarity in the common interest. The task for the future is to provide a fully operational staff and equipment of the European Border Guard and Coast. The countries must ensure the continued availability of the necessary resources for current and future joint operations, as well as to launch the mandatory reserves for the needs of rapid border intervention. They will also have to take into account the results of assessments of the vulnerability to fix the shortcomings noted. The first results of this work have become the basis to eliminate the most important weaknesses urgently. This

means a possibility to respond on the most pressing issues related to migration in the coming months.

Then, the Visegrad countries want the EU to remain a global player - significant and respected in the world arena. Due to dynamic changes in international relations, the strengthening of transatlantic relations and close cooperation with the United Kingdom can be the key points in the long term. Over the years the European Union has gradually formed its own foreign and security policy, so in the international forum can speak with one voice and act as one. Working together, the 27 member states can exert more influence on the world than if each country acted alone. Especially this presents that the EU plays an important role in solving plenty of issues of international importance, ranging from the monitoring of Iran's nuclear program, restoring the balance in Somalia and, more broadly, in the Horn of Africa, and ending the fight against global warming. Moreover, the Union occupies a leading position in world trade and emits the second most important currency in the world - the euro. As member states speak about foreign policy issues more frequently with one voice, the importance of the EU grows. Not only does that organization work with all major partners in the globe – not excepting the emerging powers, but also the European Union seeks to ensure that the partnership is based on common interests and benefits to each party had both rights and responsibilities. To encapsulate, the survival of the values underlying the EU Treaties is the task and responsibility of all the signatories.

Last but not least, the priority of the V4 in 2017 may be to preserve the cohesion of the European Union and strengthening democratic control, but with respect for the role of national parliaments. Any form of enhanced cooperation within the EU should be open to each member state with no form of discrimination or marginalization

can be allowed. The Visegrad Group should declare the necessity of returning to the roots and do not let differences of opinions led to the negative political and economic effects. In Input to Rome Declaration 2017 the partners announce:

“Reaching consensus is indispensable if we want to foster confidence in our activities. Regardless of the speed of integration, we all need to pull in one direction, have a common objective, vision and trust in a strong and prosperous Union”.

What is worth mentioning, the role of national parliaments is particularly important for East-Central Europe due to their history. Polish Marshall of the Sejm Ryszard Kuchciński noticed that their importance could increase by ordering certain rules clarifying terminology. For example, the principle of cohesion and the functioning of subsidiarity resulted from the Treaty of Lisbon.¹⁵ To achieve this, it is necessary to further debate and concretize the vision of strengthening the independence of states.

Taking everything into consideration, the importance of collaboration among the V4 partners has not only political, but also economic dimension. Even before the EU accession, the Visegrad Group governments have signed a free trade agreement that strengthened their economic cooperation. In fact all these countries have a lot in common. We are dealing with the post-communist, fast-growing economies, which are just building their positions. A typical feature of these states is a relatively high share of industry in GDP¹⁶ and wide relationships with the European Union through a main focus with Germany. German companies are attracted to them as they are considered relatively cheap and with high-quality workforce.

In the Visegrad countries exist 64.3 million people, which is 12.7 percent of population of the whole European Union. Although in

terms of population, the V4 cannot compare with Germany. Its GDP is almost four times smaller with exports 2.5 times less. The total GDP of the Visegrad Group, calculated at current prices, is not much bigger than the Netherlands and, adjusted for purchasing power of the currency, is roughly equal to the GDP of Spain. Also, in direct investments in the V4 countries, capital from Western Europe prevails. The key question is how much the V4 states can stand up to the countries of Western Europe, whose economic importance is incomparably greater than the rest of the EU. As it was mentioned before, both the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia have a high share of industry in GDP and they are trying to attract foreign investment by competing with each other in this area to determine which country will offer the best conditions. They are dependent on energy imports (mainly from Russia) and are looking for markets primarily in the Western Europe. Today it is rather unlikely to create conditions for deeper economic integration among the Visegrad countries. The most important task of the V4 economies is to diversify the structure of the commercial partners with the intention of reducing the dependence on the Western economic contractors. Any slowdown in the German economy can therefore be partially offset by economic cooperation within the Visegrad Group or other countries.

DIFFICULT PARTNERSHIP

Visegrad cooperation has always been difficult and rarely arranged seamlessly. In 1993, weakening of regional links could have been seen which was caused, among others, by attitude the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Vaclav Klaus who was very critically approached to the concept of cooperation within the Visegrad Group. He rejected a Central European identity that not only significantly hampers cooperation in the previously accepted formula, but also above all expressively undermined the sense of a

continued functioning of such an association. The situation changed in 1998 when the Visegrad Group has again become the desired consultative forum and instrument of support in the international arena. Thanks to removing from power the Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, Slovakia could return to the path of negotiations with the EU and NATO.

The biggest challenge for the Visegrad countries was joining the European Union in 2004, which also meant fulfilling the main task, setting the V4 itself. Almost immediately there appeared doubts concerning the further existence of the Visegrad Group and its possible transformation. The members announced the declaration of highlighting need for further operation. It was stressed that the organized form of cooperation between member states was a useful tool to help fight for the interests and position of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia in the structures of the European Union.

In 2016 the importance of the role of the V4 in the EU unexpectedly increased, which was the effect of the immigration crisis and Brexit. For many years the cooperation within the Group was loose, although the meetings of the leaders and ministers were held frequently. Nowadays, the Visegrad countries proclaim common declarations on key issues in the reform of the European Union, including the approach to immigrants and even Ukraine and Russia. Needless to say, the key issue that cemented the group's operations during last time was the question about forced relocation of refugees. All four member states are strongly opposed to this idea and with one voice proclaim it during debates with Brussels. Perhaps this is why the former presidential candidate from Austria, Norbert Hofer, admitted that he wanted his country, in the near future, to join the V4. In fact it is not something that,

indeed, most distinguishes the V4 states from the rest of the EU - many other countries manifest less overt resistance.

Meanwhile, the Economic Forum in Krynica-Zdrój has highlighted the rift inside the Visegrad Group. For Poland and Hungary the V4 the group could be actual counterbalance to the alliance of Berlin and Paris. They are afraid if there is no reform of the EU, other countries can follow the UK and also decide to leave its structures. Viktor Orbán stated: "We need to move as hussars. Polish-Hungarian relations are more important than politics. The saying goes that if you trust someone, you can steal horses together. The Hungarians will gladly steal horses with the Poles". Even so, the Czech Republic and Slovakia do not share the imperial plans of their partners. They do not want neither more nor less in Europe than it is today. Their approach to membership in the community is primarily a pragmatic attitude and the implementation of specific interests. They are not interested in the ideological crusade. In Prague and Bratislava the European Union looks differently than in Budapest and Warsaw. Czechs and Slovaks do not understand the ideological obstinacy of their right-wing partners. According to many experts, the power of the Visegrad Group and its leading role in the European Union is a pipe dream to come true. Too many things divide its members. Even such issues as looking at the policy towards Russia (Poland wants to maintain the sanctions while the rest of the V4 sees in the Kremlin a political partner), the future of the European Union (the Czechs are in favor of maintaining the status quo whereas Poland and Hungary want 180 degree changes) or their position within it. Therefore, the Czechs and Slovaks prefer to focus on what unites rather than divides the Visegrad states. "The V4 relatively recently joined the European Union but, thanks to the cooperation, achieved in the Community a strong position; Now their influence is

threatened by internal disputes about the future of the EU” – writes the *Financial Times*.¹⁷ After the referendum, which determined the Brexit, Warsaw and Budapest grew up on the most vocal critics of the EU, jointly calling for radical changes in the EU treaties. Diplomatic sources warn that internal divisions will weaken the positive perception of the Visegrad Group. The FT reminds the strong position of the regional bloc led to subsidies for modernization of roads, railways and cities, the combination of national electricity grids and caused a weakening of the guidelines on combating climate change, which could badly affect the mines and power plants in the region.

According to the newspaper, Slovakia, which belongs to the Eurozone, is a V4 country most integrated with the EU and, as the country currently holding the EU presidency, is trying to act as the "conciliation negotiator" and mitigate its own nationalist rhetoric.

The Czech Republic is traditionally perceived as the most pro-Western V4 state who appreciates relations with Germans more than with other allies. Some observers predict the Czech Republic and Slovakia can start touting alternative alliances, e.g. with Austria, to demonstrate dissatisfaction with the hard rhetoric of their partners in the V4. Not to mention that in the Group there is also opposition to the Hungarian proposal of extending the format of Croatia.

MEMBERS OF THE UNITED EUROPE ABOVE ALL

The nature of the external challenges encountered by the EU makes the Visegrad cooperation an effective inspiration for the concurrence of countries of the whole Eastern and Central European region, covering the area between the Baltic, Adriatic and Black Sea. Worth mentioning is that the Visegrad Group

countries (like most other new EU member states) actually differ from the old countries because of the rapid increase in living standards. Eurostat¹⁸ data confirm that assumption. In 2003, just before the EU accession, GDP per capita was in Poland (according to purchasing power) only 48% of the EU average. In 2015 it was already 69%. In Slovakia, there was an increase from 55% to 77%, in the Czech Republic from 77% to 82%, and in Hungary from 62% to 68%. At the same time, many old the EU countries stayed in the same place or lost, in particular Greece (from 93% to 71%), Italy (from 111% to 95%) and even the United Kingdom (from 123% to 110%).

Perhaps another essential topic for the Hungarian presidency will be energy security. One of the most relevant tasks is to ensure broad political support for the project to build the North-South gas corridor. At the discussion, matters like security of oil supplies and the issue of shaping energetic and climate policy cannot be forgotten.

The Visegrad countries also joined efforts to implement common EU defence policy. In particular, the Polish and Czech governments recently flowed calls for the creation of a European army. This long-term plan, difficult to implement, is roughly in accordance with the proposals of The President of the European Commission. However, for now this idea seems impossible to fulfil because of the Euro-scepticism among growing number of citizens and questions about the subjectivity of national states. It is not a secret that having the own army is one of the traditional attributes of statehood.

The V4 countries consider themselves as successful countries, which was made possible also thanks to membership in the Union. The present multi-dimensional sphere of not only financial, but also awareness crisis poses to the whole of Europe new challenges and the threat of renewed divisions on the continent. Noticeable is

the criticism of the changes. The Visegrad countries, like the rest of Central Europe, shall not remain neutral to these dangers. While getting involved in the unification of the continent, they must strive for proper development of the European agenda, defence achievements in the field of freedoms and civil liberties, deepen the single market as well as continue the development of the neighbourhood policy. The protracted crisis promotes national egoisms and makes it difficult to reach a consensus. On the contrary, the societies of the Visegrad countries still represent a large enthusiasm for that idea, despite the problems associated with the phenomena of deadlock, transformation costs and burdens resulting from the adjustment to the EU requirements. The V4 members shall put greater emphasis on improving infrastructure, facilitating contacts between their societies, as well as the further development of economic, cultural or scientific. It is extremely important to promote exchanges of young people, students and academic fields. There is also a need for better understanding of their societies, burdened with historical stereotypes and the use of the geographic location for the acquisition of new investment, growth and strengthening national security. The Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia also must ensure the full use of all these factors in the region, which confirm the real value of the EU *acquis communautaire* and embody fundamental freedoms, which are the pillars of European integration (free movement of goods, capital, services and people). Furthermore, greater consistency and resulting from it, even closer cooperation should contribute to the attractiveness of the region.

In July 6-7, 2017 in Wrocław, Poland takes place the Wrocław Global Forum.¹⁹ This is one of the leading transatlantic conferences on current politics and economics in East-Central Europe. The organizers of the WGF are: the Municipality of Wrocław, the Polish

Institute of International Affairs and the prestigious American think-tank, the Atlantic Council. Every year, for a few days several hundred politicians, economists, politicians, journalists and community leaders come to Wrocław. These include heads of state, foreign ministers, renowned political analysts, parliamentarians, regularly across the Atlantic arrives in Wrocław strong representation of the US Senate and House of Representatives. The subject of the debates includes the hottest phenomena of the modern world, e.g. the last two editions of the WGF dominated the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the wave of refugees from the Middle East and Africa. This year Donald Trump, the newly elected President of the United States, is also invited. It shows that the V4 does not want to become isolated from the world and recognizes the need for dialogue.

CONCLUSION

The Visegrad Group is a regional association, lacking an institutional administration. The cooperation is based on the rotational presidency and meetings of representatives of all countries at various levels. As a result, regular meetings of heads of government as well as individual ministers, enable comprehensive involvement of the Group in solving the problems of the region. It seems that maintaining current standards of operation is the most desirable. The mission of the Visegrad Group did not end in 2004 but then took an additional dimension on many levels. Identification of new priorities has shown the important role played by the V4. The ties between members of the Group are now much stronger than at the moment of its inception. The Visegrad partnership became a symbol and role model of integration for other regions. Moreover, the V4 has become a famous brand – an example of successful initiatives for the realization of common interests and a key element of cooperation in Central Europe. It

should be emphasized again that in recent years, after some ups and downs during the first decade of development, the Visegrad cooperation has reached an impressive level of intensity. This allows the V4 increasingly engaging in solving the growing problems of the globalization era. Through increased cooperation, the Visegrad Group - a kind of nucleus of Central Europe and a reference point for the other partners (including those from other continents) - found a place in the consciousness in the political, social and cultural sphere, as well as in planning business ventures. Speaking of the Visegrad Group, we are talking about common interests, even though we know that it does not mean unanimity. However, it is important that the development of the Visegrad cooperation in the EU has established the belief that this partnership brings added value for the consistency and stability of the region and is also beneficial for the European Union as a whole. The strong, effective and determined Visegrad Group effectively strengthens the EU. What is important, the V4 leaders determine their further cooperation by acting within the Union and aim towards a strong and united continent. The Visegrad Group makes the sense of participation in European affairs sharper and puts a stronger emphasis on the political role of Central European cooperation in the EU. What can the leaders do now? Communicate and seek opportunities to synchronize ways to further interests of the V4 countries and highlight the objective community of interests so that the role of the wider cohesion of the region and the EU is invaluable. Their will to cooperate within the European Union has been strongly emphasized in the aforementioned declaration from Warsaw:

“The EU remains the best tool to meet the challenges ahead of us. The values on which the EU is based, i.e. - human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights -

*remain valid. The EU should remain open to those countries, who share these values, including in particular the Western Balkan countries and our eastern neighbors”.*²⁰

Lastly, cessation of internal struggle and agreement on mutual concessions in order to reach a compromise. Back to the roots and cooperation in the name of common values. These are the most significant challenges of the Hungarian Presidency in the Visegrad Group. Experience has shown that together they can win. Going deeper, identity and visibility of the V4 are important as well as building unity based on common heritage and values, the social aspect of partnership and effective communication strategies.

The predictable objectives of the Hungarian presidency of the Visegrad Group of 2017 are ambitious. But the times, in which we live, require ambitious action. Being ambitious is an inherent feature of the V4 as such.

1

European Commission Speech State of the Union Address 2016: Towards a better Europe – a Europe that protects, empowers and defends. Strasbourg, 14 September 2016. <http://europa.eu>

² Remarks by President Donald Tusk after the Bratislava summit. September 16, 2016 <http://www.consilium.europa.eu>

³ See: Stepper Péter: The Visegrad Group and the EU Agenda on Migration: A Coalition of the Unwilling?, *Corvinus Journal of International Affairs* 1 : 1 pp. 62-82. (2016)

⁴ ‘Flexible solidarity’ would enable member states to decide on specific forms of contribution taking into account their experience and potential. Additionally, it notes that any distribution mechanism should be voluntary. Végh, Zsuzsanna. Intergovernmentalism or differentiated integration: the way out of the current impasse. December 19, 2016. <http://visegradinsight.eu>

⁵ WORLD NEWS. Jancarikova, Tatiana & Hovet, Jason. September 17, 2016. <http://uk.reuters.com/>

⁶ The term of 2016/2017 is a period covering the Polish presidency

⁷ Hungarians call themselves Magyar and their country Magyarország; Magyar is a representative of the Finno-Ugric people who settled in the 10th century in Hungary. <http://sjp.pwn.pl>

⁸ Lubomír Zaorálek is the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

⁹ The speech of Polish Prime Minister on the second day of the 26th Economic Forum in Krynica-Zdrój, Poland on 6-8 September, 2016

¹⁰ The European Single Market guarantees the free movement of goods, capital, services and people – the ‘four freedoms’ within the European Union

¹¹ Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries Strong Europe – Union of Action and Trust. Warsaw, March 2, 2017. <http://www.msz.gov.pl>

¹² Collegium Civitas is a Polish non-public university located in Warsaw, Poland. To learn more, go to <https://www.civitas.edu.pl/en/>

¹³ Eksperci: Głos Grupy Wyszehradzkiej zostanie wysłuchany w Unii Europejskiej. March 4, 2017. <http://www.pap.pl/>

¹⁴ REGULATION (EU) 2016/1624 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL of 14 September 2016 on the European Border and Coast Guard and amending Regulation (EU) 2016/399 of the European Parliament and of the Council and repealing Regulation (EC) No 863/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council, Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 and Council Decision 2005/267/EC

¹⁵ These conclusions were the result of a work meeting of the presidents of parliaments of the Visegrad Group which was held in Przemyśl, Poland, December 6, 2016

¹⁶ GDP (Gross Domestic Product); the value of a country's overall output of goods and services (typically during one fiscal year) at market prices, excluding net income from abroad. <http://www.businessdictionary.com>

¹⁷ Foy, Henry & Byrne, Anrew. Splits over EU test relations between Visegrad Four. October 6, 2016 <https://www.ft.com>

¹⁸ Eurostat is the statistical office of the European Union. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/main/home>

¹⁹ To learn more, go to <http://www.wroclawglobalforum.com>

²⁰ Joint Statement of the Heads of Governments of the V4 Countries Strong Europe – Union of Action and Trust, Warsaw, March 2, 2017. <http://www.msz.gov.pl>

ESSAY

ETHNOCENTRISM IN THE VISEGRAD GROUP: ITS CAUSES AND INFLUENCES ON THE BRATISLAVA PROCESS

LIV HEINRICH

ABSTRACT

In the joint statement of the Visegrad group from 16 September 2016, the day of the launch of the Bratislava process, the Visegrad group gave a statement on their ideas on the improvement of the EU and devoted most of it to security and migration. As responses to the decrease of a sense of security among citizens which is in their opinion caused by terrorism and cross-border crime, they see a great necessity in the reduction of the number of immigrants entering the EU and demand better protection of the EU's external borders through further cooperation with Turkey and other transit countries, a further development of FRONTEX, the improvement of the Schengen-Information-System (SIS) and the general data management architecture.

INTRODUCTION

In the joint statement of the Visegrad group from 16 September 2016, the day of the launch of the Bratislava process, the Visegrad group gave a statement on their ideas on the improvement of the EU and devoted most of it (1/3 of the entire statement) to security and migration. As responses to the decrease of a sense of security among citizens which is in their opinion caused by terrorism and cross-border crime, they see a great necessity in the reduction of the number of immigrants entering the EU and demand better protection of the EU's external borders through further cooperation with Turkey and other transit countries, a further development of FRONTEX, the improvement of the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the general data management architecture, including the setup of the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), a better operation of the operating IT Systems, check of individual border crossings and the support of membership aspirations in the Western Balkans

Even among their own population, neither the Visegrad group nor its work are very well-known. Still, the cooperation among Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia is of importance, especially to its leading politicians. The Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło said about the Visegrad cooperation in connection with EU reformation process:

*“We agree that the Visegrad group needs to be active in the process of changes, which the EU is expecting. We will propose solutions that are meant to pursue especially one goal: to strengthen the EU so it can focus more on the affairs of its citizen and to guarantee security to all Europeans.”*1*

In the joint statement of the Visegrad group from 16 September 2016, the day of the launch of the Bratislava process, the Visegrad group gave a statement on their ideas on the improvement of the EU and devoted most of it (1/3 of the entire statement) to security and migration.² As responses to the decrease of a sense of security among citizens which is in their opinion caused by terrorism and cross-border crime, they see a great necessity in the reduction of the number of immigrants entering the EU and demand better protection of the EU's external borders through further cooperation with Turkey and other transit countries, a further development of FRONTEX, the improvement of the Schengen Information System (SIS) and the general data management architecture, including the setup of the European

Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), a better operation of the operating IT-Systems, check of individual border-crossings and the support of membership aspirations in the Western Balkans. Additionally, the group points out the advantages of the size and diversity of the European Union and their aspiration to strengthen democracy in the EU and economic integration.³

While looking through the past year's news about the V4, one can't help but notice that they could be summarised under the title of: "We (Visegrad) will not submit to Western European strategies, we have our own interests and we stay strong to fulfil them". These "own interests" include more than just the often discussed discrepancies in attitude towards migration and the often discussed quota system. The Visegrad countries, mainly personified by the populist governments of Poland and Hungary, want more than just block Western Europe's propositions about migration, they want to counterbalance the

domination of the leading countries and stop being treated like the periphery of Europe.⁴⁵

Very representative for this is the “Nutella Council”. This year, Slovakia’s ministry of agriculture compared the quality of some products in its capital and in Austria and found that Eastern European products are often inferior, containing more sugar and more fat, to the products available in the richer West. Prime Minister Fico summarised the feelings of his country, not only about the discrepancy in alimentation, but also about the general sense of inferiority that sticks to the eastern member states: “These practices are humiliating and create two categories of citizens in the EU.”*⁶

In this essay, I want to explore a bit further what are the causes of the lasting feeling of the

V4 to be the periphery of Europe, how their problems to establish a stable economy and democracy are connected to it and how it leads to ethnocentrism, which leads to the election of populist governments who later influence the EU reforms.

TRANSITION IN THE VISEGRAD COUNTRIES: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

There are many similarities between the Visegrad countries and their recent history, they lead to similar economic and political struggles, but also differences in their economic development and political apparatus, changing their position in the EU and in the group. The V4 states have a very similar history of foreign determination followed by the, comparably short, recent period of sovereignty after 1990, this brings about some difficulties: The value of law in a country that is new to sovereign governance is certainly different than in the

traditionally “ruling” states, peoples that are new to their own rule of law often have problems respecting this rule, finding a dialogue and engaging into the functioning of their state. Very often, they are used to finding loopholes in the system and to live according to the rules of their own “parallel” law rather than the rules that are established by the authorities.⁷⁸

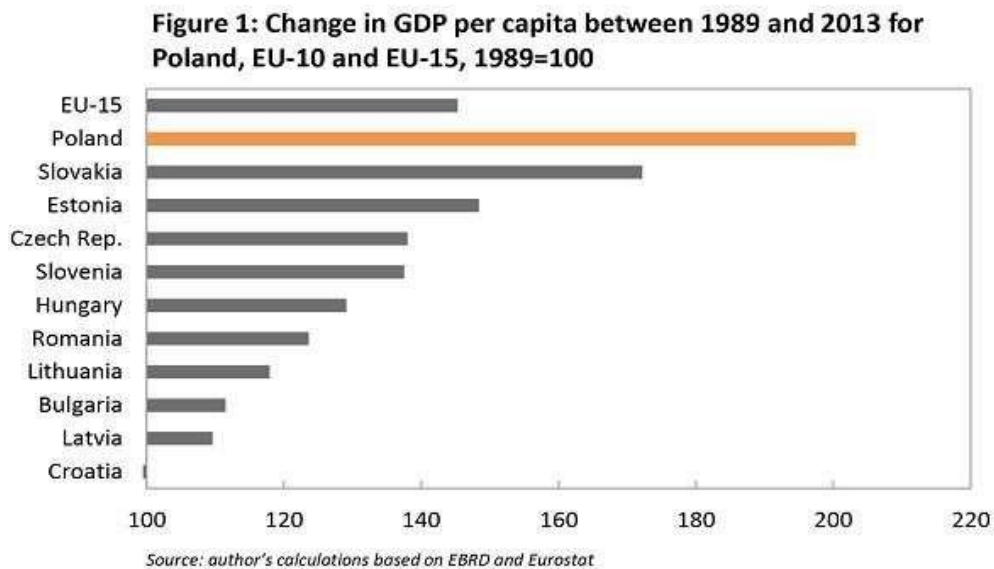
Like every post- socialist state, also the Visegrad group had a problem to establish their own liberal democracies with a multiple- party system, as they were lacking parties and without a broad, differing political opinion. The communist mindsets in the population made it also difficult to establish a functioning political system, at the beginning of transition, the countries were quick to establish democratic institutions, mainly with the help of NATO and EU, but they were simply lacking a democratic culture. It is difficult to create dialogues and cooperation between opponents when sentences like “Who isn’t with us is against us” dominate the political conversation and individuals with opposing opinions aims to crush their opposition, not to work with it. Additionally, the complexity of a liberal democracy “democracy” being about the community and “liberalism” being about the individual- posed some problems for the peoples of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Czechia, what happened in consequence was the establishment of a “simplified” democracy that did not encounter minorities and struggled with the public opinion in many aspects. To the top of it all, one could argue that in the age of globalisation, forming a democracy is even harder as it questions the idea of a nation state and did change means of communication and the relationship between media and politics, which was already complicated due to the missing tradition of political journalism during communist times.⁹

Looking at the present state of each individual Visegrad member state, Hungary is perhaps the most worrying example. Democracy in Hungary has been dissolving since 2010 when Viktor Orban was, for the second time, elected president. Fidesz, Orban's party, received absolute majority with 53% of all votes and unilaterally voted a new Constitution after he took office, which centralised all power to the hands of the Prime Minister, constrains public and commercial media, cuts social benefits and limits characteristic freedoms of a liberal democracy, such as freedom of press, freedom to take popular initiatives and social rights. One of the reasons this happened is the base of Hungarian society on nepotism and informality, like mentioned above, all Visegrad states had or have a different perception on the obedience of the rule of law, but Hungary is even more extreme in that sense: as success in society is widely based on contacts and links between politicians and people, many jobs and positions are dependent on whoever is ruling, this is one of the reasons for the frequent changes of rule. This "democracy of privilege" is the consequence of the state's political institutions being established by intellectuals who did not question their decisions and found superficial solutions for transition. Orban understood exactly these principles and based his policies on the establishment of a central arena of power, with him as the middle. He eliminated the idea of political competition, replaced heads of media and other important positions with his allies and took measures to homogenise culture and national identity. The aspect of identity is very important, as there is a large number of Hungarian minorities in Hungary's neighbouring countries and ancient territories that the Hungarian government tries to include, Orban therefore follows the idea of ethnic nationalism, not civic, and leaves the minorities in his own territories out.¹⁰ When it

came to the vote on a migration- distribution quota in the European Council, Hungary voted against, even though it would have profited from a quota and could have earned €27 Mio. as a country with a lot of immigration from third- country nationals- even though the migration to Hungary is motivated by its geographical position- Hungary, registered approximately 15 tsd. third- national migrants in 2015, even though it must have been crossed by many more people on their way to western Europe the same year.¹¹¹² The case of Czechia and Slovakia is a bit different, the countries, who left the Soviet bloc as one, divided peacefully in 1993 after elections surfaced two incompatible leading parties in the territories (the Civic party in Czechia and Public against violence in Slovakia) and paralysed the political machine, the new leaders worked on the peaceful split into two and neither of the countries had problems of getting recognised. Interestingly, the Czech Communist party, as the only one of the ex- Eastern bloc, was never dissolved or transformed into a far- left party. It remained a political force, even though Communism was officially banned in 1993. Czechia also faced problems during the privatisation of its economy, similar to the rule of law in society, people had problems understanding the rule of law of the market and corruption remains a problem, even until today.¹³

Both Slovakia and Czechia voted against the migration quota, maybe out of Visegrad- Solidarity towards Hungary. Both countries are rather against a further integration of the Union, they prefer being in the EU for economic and security reasons. Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico is very well aware of this fact, he stated: "*For Slovakia I say it in one sentence: 86 percent of all public investments come from EU- sources. We would not survive without the EU.*"¹⁴

The most successful and most praised example of transition is Poland. While looking for information about the transformation, a lot of information surfaces, mostly economic, not political. Poland is the number one example of how economic transition should work, privatisation was quick, today, there are no oligarchs in Poland, the amount of young people frequenting higher education institutions quintupled, Poland is the fastest growing economy in the European Union and was the only member state that managed to avoid contraction after 2008.¹⁵¹⁶



Graph 1. Change in GP per capita between 1989 and 2013. Source: Marcin Piatowski: How Poland Became Europe's Growth Champion: Insights from the Successful Post-Socialist Transition. Brookings. 11/02/2015.

Yet, Poland has problems, especially on the political level, since 2015, the conservative PiS is in charge of power and takes a Christian-conservative political course, tried to sharpen abortion laws, cooperating closer with the church, changing the Constitution and distancing itself from the EU. The Polish government did in fact not vote for the re-election of their own statesman Donald Tusk as the

president of the European Council but proposed their own candidate Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, a man without experience in governance. This way, Poland did not only give the impression of taking the position of the President of the European Council for granted, but also showed the government's immaturity in the way that the personal rivalry between Tusk and Kaczynski, who accuses Tusk of being involved in the death of his brother Lech Kaczynski in 2010, influences Poland's European politics.¹⁷ Being the most ethnically homogenous country in Europe (97% of Poles are Polish, 96% are Catholic) it becomes difficult to imagine why a nation that did not have many experiences with migrants since 1945 has a generally more sceptic view about immigration from outside the Union (61% of Poles prefer immigrants from in the EU, 39% have positive feelings about non EU-immigration). Poland did initially vote in favour of the quota, but joined the other V4 members in their opposition after.^{18,19}

ETHNOCENTRISM: DEFINITION AND CAUSES

The reason for not only Poland's, but the entire Visegrad group's strong opposition towards a quota and the propositions towards a migration policy that would force them to accept refugees can be explained with the phenomenon of ethnocentrism.

The Oxford dictionary defines ethnocentrism as an "evaluation of other cultures according to preconceptions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture".²⁰ What can this tell us about the struggle to find a common EU migration policy?

Some countries, groups of countries like Visegrad, people, groups of people, do not want to welcome immigrants or refugees, others are

very open about it, this places the heads of states of the EU in a dilemma: how to cooperate further and find appropriate solutions when national or regional interests collide?²¹

Political leaders generally “filter their decisions on foreign policy through the motives of their leadership”²², accordingly, to understand the discrepancies between the attitudes towards migration of different governments, one has to understand what they promised their people and why they were voted. Did the citizens of the Visegrad countries vote for populist leaders because of their own ethnocentrism or are the citizens of these countries ethnocentric, maybe even racist, because of the tone used by their leaders while talking about different peoples?

Most probably it is a mutual influence, caused not only by the migrational isolation of the V4 but also by their economic problems and the earlier described sense of inferiority towards the richer West and North. Despite the measures undertaken by the EU to achieve regional equality, the discrepancies have grown since the 2004 eastern enlargement when poorer countries joined, but also since the financial crisis that hit some countries harder than others. Looking at statistics comparing the changes in trust in society and trust in social relations between 2006 and 2012 in North- Western European countries and South- Eastern European countries, it is easily understandable why certain regions have a higher amount of populist votes and Euroscepticism than others.

Figure 6: Trust in Society: 2006 and 2012 (Northern and Western Europe)

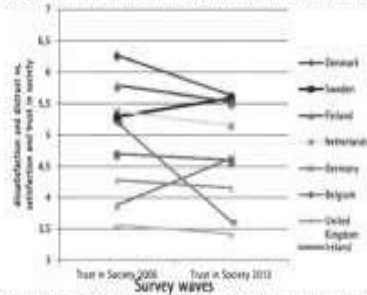


Figure 7: Trust in Social Relations: 2006 and 2012 (Northern and Western Europe)

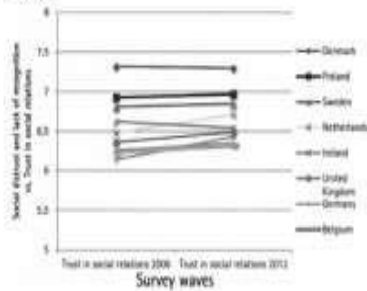


Figure 8: Trust in Society: 2006 and 2012 (Eastern and Southern Europe)

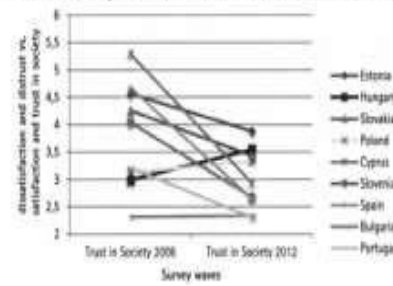
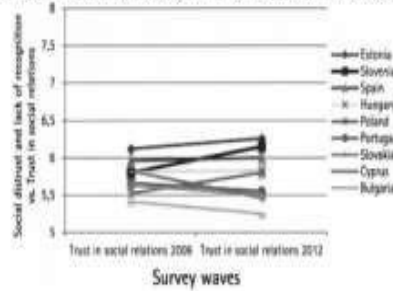


Figure 9: Trust in Social Relations: 2006 and 2012 (Southern and Eastern Europe)



Trust in Society. Source: Wolfgang Aschauer. Societal Malaise and Ethnocentrism in the European Union: Monitoring Societal Change by Focusing on EU Citizens' Perceptions of Crisis. Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung Vol. 41, No. 2 (156). GESIS- Leibniz Institute for social sciences. 2016.

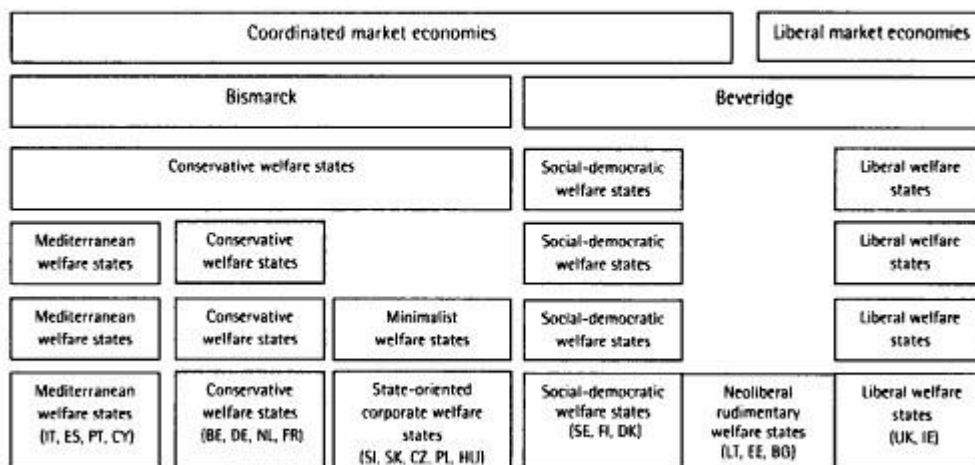
While the North- West started at a higher level, they mostly improved or slightly decreased their trust in society, except for Belgium, and remained a stable level of trust in social relations. In the East- South on the contrary, Trust in society decreased, with the exception of Hungary while social recognition stayed stable too, but at a lower level than in the North- West.

Another measure of comparing European states and what they do for their people is the comparison between the different types of welfare states that exist in Europe.²³ In the European comparison of public expenditure for social protection, the Visegrad countries are at the bottom end, spending less than half of the European average on public protection, Poland being the only country to note a significant growth in expenditure from 21% to 28% percent of it GDP from 2003 to 2013,

Czechia a small growth and both Slovakia and Hungary keeping their spending stable.²⁴ The quality of the welfare state and the amount of trust that citizens can give to their social protection forces is a strong influencer on their fear of social decline. In the Visegrad countries, together with Slovenia, the minimalist welfare state system with the Bismarck model prevails. Especially since the economic crisis, the importance of the efficiency of a welfare state for its people has been shown. If more people are unemployed, more people are at the bottom of society and build a wider ground for radicalisation.

A survey conducted from in 2012 with 21 EU members participating classified the European welfare systems into six categories that reflect how much states spend for their citizen's welfare and where groups of countries come together.

Figure 2: A Typology of Six European Regions Based on the Varieties of Capitalism Approach and Welfare-State Research



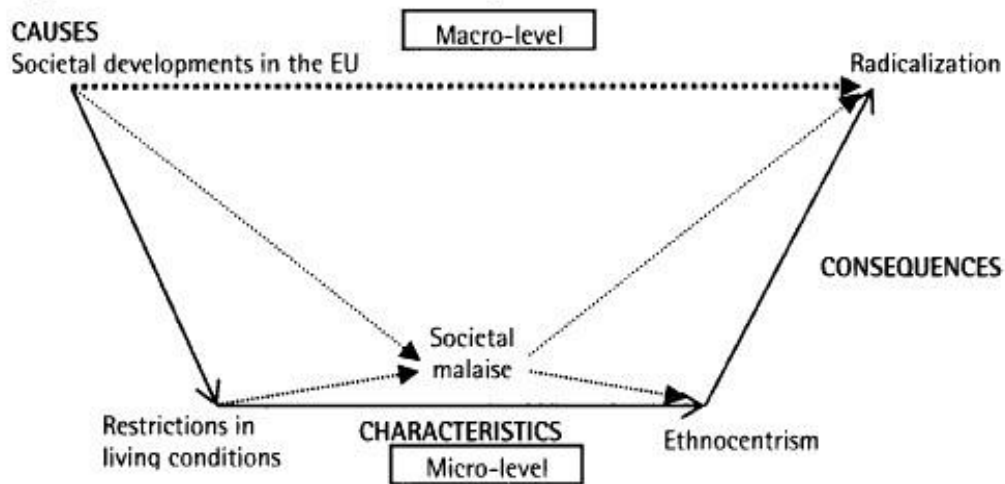
Note: Modified and extended according to Schröder (2013, 59).

Typology of Six EU Regions. Source: Wolfgang Aschauer. Societal Malaise and Ethnocentrism in the European Union: Monitoring Societal Change by Focusing on EU Citizens' Perceptions of Crisis.

Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung Vol. 41, No. 2 (156). GESIS- Leibniz Institute for social sciences. 2016.

The Macro-Micro-Macro Explanation Scheme illustrates the influences Macro level decision have on Macro radicalisation, but more strongly on Micro-level living restrictions, leading to social malaise

Figure 1: The Macro-Micro-Macro Explanation Scheme for Ethnocentrism



Macro-Micro Explanation Scheme for Ethnocentrism. Source: Wolfgang Aschauer. Societal Malaise and Ethnocentrism in the European Union: Monitoring Societal Change by Focusing on EU Citizens' Perceptions of Crisis. Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung Vol. 41, No. 2 (156). GESIS- Leibniz Institute for social sciences. 2016.

(unwell being) and ethnocentrism, which again results in radicalisation. The forces that lead to ethnocentrism and radicalisation are the three D's: societal decline, political disenchantment, social distrust, these forces combined with the perception of crises.

Lastly, the Explanation Model and Operationalization Strategy illustrates how changes on the Macro-level, Meso-level and Micro-level in the temporal, structural and cultural dimension influence each other and play together to cause ethnocentrism, in the Model stated as "perception of an ethnic threat".²⁵

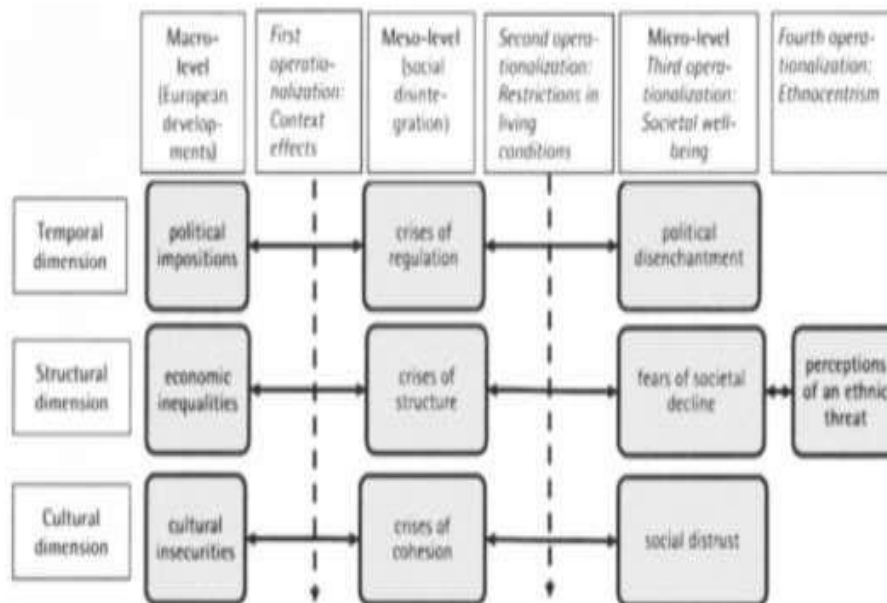
On the Macro-level, there are political impositions from the side of the EU, economic inequalities between the eastern and the western States, internal inequalities, poverty and unemployment. On a cultural dimension, the Visegrad states still share a feeling of inferiority to the West.

On the Meso-level, in the temporal dimension, V4 have to obey EU norms and values, the countries change their norms and guidelines, this leads to a change of structure, some people that were at the top are now at the bottom and the other way around. Culturally, the radical transformation done by the state loosens the cohesion of peoples.

On the Micro-level, citizens are individually disappointed after what happened and lose their trust to the system, on a structural level, they start to fear decline. Culturally, they lose their trust in each other and in society. The factor in each dimension on the different levels influence each other. Macro-level events influence Meso-level events and the other way around. The same goes for Meso-level and Micro-level.

The total of these events leads to the perception of an ethnic threat, not only out of racism or fear of being taken away what should be theirs, but also to lift themselves up and make them feel better in comparison to the “others”.

Figure 3: Overview of Explanation Model and Operationalization Strategy



Overview of Explanation Model. Source: Wolfgang Aschauer. Societal Malaise and Ethnocentrism in the European Union: Monitoring Societal Change by Focusing on EU Citizens' Perceptions of Crisis. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* Vol. 41, No. 2 (156). GESIS- Leibniz Institute for social sciences 2016.

In addition to the Model, the peoples of Eastern Europe face another feeling that greatly impact their relationship to the EU: disappointment. After the fall of the Iron Curtain and the difficult process of transition, people had hoped for so much more than what is their reality of living now, the process of transition has arrived in a vacuum: there is no more institution to join, no more democracy to develop, no more economy to privatise and yet, structural problems remained,²⁶ economic problems too and Brussels is perceived as a far-away parallel universe that treats its Eastern members like lower class citizens and gives them worse quality food as if they were the “rubbish bin of Europe”.²⁷

Lastly, the economic factors are not the only ones contributing to the level of ethnocentrism in a population, other influences can be the religious distinctions, social intelligence and education. The latter two are generally helpful when it comes to the prevention of ethnocentrism.²⁸

ETHNOCENTRISM: CONSEQUENCES FOR THE EU

As mentioned in the introduction, the Visegrad group aims to block the European migration quota and is reluctant to the idea of welcoming migrants to the continent, let alone to their countries. To name just one example of politicians openly campaigning against refugees, the Hungarian government put up advertisement before the referendum about the quota on which was written: “Did you know that since the beginning of the refugee crisis, more than 300 people died during terrorist attacks?”²⁹ Márta Padavic from the Budapest Institute commented on the campaign and summarised its purpose in a very well-fitting way: “This, with governmental funding financed campaign could even lead to violence. The goal is to churn the sentiment towards the strangers. With strong, often unreasonable arguments that let the reader only take one idea: rejection.”³⁰

Now we know what the Visegrad group demands and why, but do their campaign really fruit outside of their own territories?

Reading through the declarations’ conclusions made by the European council during the meeting on the Bratislava roadmap towards a reform of the EU, one can conclude that yes. All their demands, for the establishment of ETIAS, the improvement of border protection, the further cooperation with so-called transit countries, the improvement

of return rates and the investment into developmental aid to avoid migration in general are written in the Bratislava

Roadmap,³¹ the European Council Conclusions on migration from october 2016,³² the European Council Conclusions from December 2016,³³ the “Malta Declaration by the members of the European Council on the external aspects of migration: addressing the Central Mediterranean route” and the Conclusions from March 2017.³⁴

Now why the Visegrad group is so active right now, what are the goals of their activity, besides preventing migration?

In the end of last chapter, the sense of disappointment was mentioned, it can definitely be seen as driving force in the suddenly more intensive cooperation among the Visegrad group. After Brexit, it is clear that Visegrad needs to focus more on regional cooperation to pursue their interests and to compete with the more dominant German and French interests. Especially the polish government has interests in leading the Visegrad group, standing alone against Germany and France is not possible for Poland, but with three other heads of states by its side, who take politically similar directions, it is possible to build a counter-axe on the East of Germany. This regional isolation might be dangerous, questionable is, if Poland can take a leading position in the group itself, if it will be tolerated as the leader, being the biggest country of all or if the isolation from the West might be harming Polish trade, economy and position in the EU rather than helping.

ETHNOCENTRISM: A POSSIBLE SOLUTION

After having established all the different causes of ethnocentrism in the Visegrad group, we identified economic, cultural and political causes. One of the main social and political causes was the discrepancy

between the north-western and south-eastern Europe and the sense of inferiority that is imposed on the latter.

To prevent this discrepancy on the social level, a European passport should be introduced. People would not need to write down their specific nationality, even though they would keep their national identity and government, but they would be forced to write and to read “European” ever time they use their passport. Also, while travelling abroad, no could be distinguished or discriminated based on their passport, while crossing borders, while receiving a visa. Same has been done in France with the population of the Bretagne, they still identify as themselves in their region, but while travelling, they are predominantly identified as French and cannot be discriminated based on the fact that they come from a national minority.

Secondly, at least one of the EU institution should move to Central Europe, the feeling of being far away from decision making influences the attitudes of politicians and citizens too negatively to leave everything the way it is. It is often argued that Strasbourg as the seat of the European Parliament is indispensable because of the German-French history in the region, but any of the Visegrad countries undoubtedly has a similar, maybe even more moved history, especially with Germany and/or Austria. The move of a European institution to the region could be a measure to shift the “periphery” of the EU further to the outside and would allow Eastern Europeans who cannot travel as far as to France or Belgium to visit a European institution and to get in touch with the European Union, which can be an important educational measure.

Lastly, the creation of a European conscription based army, which is an ancient but also a never realised idea, will help not only the citizens

who forcefully get in touch with each other, to educate themselves and open up culturally, but it will also, just like the creation of a European passport, create an indistinguishable identity, everyone is in the same army, everyone goes through the same and defends the same continent during a time where NATO demands higher military expansions, the EU could unite its forces and be much more efficient and strong.

CONCLUSION

Even though ethnocentrism might be understandable in the framework of post-communist transition in Eastern Europe, the European Union should stay strong and not obey that easily to mind-sets that contradict the European idea of acceptance, tolerance and openness.

The EU's attitude towards migration as a "not in my backyard" issue and will to conclude agreements with the undemocratic governments of transit countries will not solve much in long-term. The agreements with transit countries like Turkey, concluded in spring 2016, and now, even worse, Libya, is a very unwise move from the Union. These countries could use the leaders' of the EU's fear of another migration crisis to blackmail them for their own interests, as Erdogan does already, asking for visa freedom for Turkish people and threatening to open the borders if he will not receive what he wants. Migrants will be stopped in Turkey, in Libya or in Serbia and for the Visegrad countries, who did not welcome many refugees anyways and were, despite Hungary, not even directly affected by the refugee crisis, nothing will change.

What the EU really needs to establish during the Bratislava process and EU reform is an eye-to-eye, same-level dialogue with its Eastern

members to identify their problems, their struggles and to establish a solution on how to continue a European Union where all member states are included on equal terms and no region is made feel like the “periphery”. The migration crisis of 2014 and 2015 was not the cause of ethnocentrism in the Visegrad group, it was the indicator that surfaced ethnocentrism and showed us that something clearly is not right with the EU’s internal balance of power.

The superficial short-term solution of the migration crisis that will lead to thousands of people living in inhumane conditions either in their own countries, in transit countries that do not respect human rights nor have acceptable accommodation standards or at the borders in the Balkans while waiting for the possibility to attain what should be a human right: the possibility to get a better life.

After the migration crisis, another crisis will come and if the EU won’t sit down and find a solution that allows the fair functioning of the community, ethnocentrism is not going to be defeated, not in the V4, nor in Eastern Europe nor in any other member state that has problems with its populist parties.

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*Quotations marked with * are translated by the author*

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