

V4 Road to Euroatlantic Integration

—

30 year after

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30-20-15 and the Changing World

Dr. Péter Rada¹

The last three decades we have discussed comprehensively on the new world order² and consequently the challenges stemming from the new realities. Having said that, 2019 is a special year to think back as it commemorates many anniversaries. The symbolic numerology of the „30-20-15” reflects the cornerstones and of course the many headaches in Central Europe. For us Central Europeans the real question related to the new world order has been our ability to adapt to these new realities.

As mentioned above 2019 was a symbolic historic benchmark when our region's countries celebrated and commemorated leaving the Soviet sphere of influence 30 years ago; the 20th anniversary of the NATO membership for Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic; the 15th anniversary of the EU membership and for many the NATO membership; and not least the 70th anniversary of the Washington Treaty. During this long transition process the Central European countries have had and caused many headaches during the parallel political, economic, and societal changes which ended in the full Euroatlantic integration. It has been a long and exhausting road but today Central Europeans are more pro-NATO

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² Péter Rada, “Átalakuló biztonsági kihívások, a biztonság dimenziói,” in *Új világrénd? Nemzetközi kapcsolatok a hidegháború utáni világban*, ed. Péter Rada, Grotius Könyvtár, I (Budapest: Corvinus Külügyi és Kulturális Egyesület; Ifjú Közgazdászok Közhasznú Egyesülete, 2007), 53–72, http://real.mtak.hu/80396/1/Grotius_konyvtar_1_szam_Uj_vilagrend.pdf; Péter Rada, “Rebuilding of Failed States,” 2007, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/c158/2b186e63610f9f2b9d5fa5f6be8896fdf582.pdf>; Péter Rada, “Új típusú biztonsági kihívások,” in *Biztonságpolitikai Corvinák: Háttéranyagok korunk legfontosabb biztonságpolitikai problémáinak megértéséhez*, ed. Csaba Rada (Budapest: Corvinus Külügyi és Kulturális Egyesület, 2008), 7–19.

and have better views on the United States than most of the citizens of older allies despite some up and downs in the alliance and some inconsistent American policies towards the region. It has been often mentioned in the last years that Atlanticism is waning in Europe but actual opinion polls from Central Europe cannot back these fears.³ This is partly the consequence of the successful Euroatlantic integration of Central Europe. And also it is true that the NATO regained some momentum after the Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea.

Even though 2019 is a symbolic year but we also know that the new world order have brought new threats and new challenges. The Euroatlantic integration's importance lied in this very characteristic of the international system and politics that it has changes many times and very quickly. The last decades were more than unpredictable therefore being the member of a stable political, military and economic alliance has been a guarantee for our region's countries.

At the end of the first decade of the new century many publications tried to analyze the changes in international relations and they tried to predict the possible ways how our world would develop.⁴ This is still a valid questions today⁵ and it is very important because in case we understand our world better we can adapt to it easier. It is even more important if we think about how volatile the events were in the last decade. The 2010s began very

³ "NATO- és USA-pártiak a közép-európaiak, de többet várnak Trumptól," Nézőpont Intézet, accessed March 3, 2019, <http://nezopointintezet.hu/analysis/trump/>.

⁴ Rada, "Átalakuló biztonsági kihívások"; Rada, "Rebuilding of Failed States"; Rada, "Új típusú biztonsági kihívások."

⁵ Péter Marton, István Balogh, and Péter Rada, *Biztonsági tanulmányok: Új fogalmi keretek, és tanulságok a visegrádi országok számára* (Budapest: Antall József Tudásközpont, 2015); Péter Rada, "Megváltozó világunk és a biztonsági kihívások átalakulása," in *Biztonságpolitikai Corvinák*, ed. Kinga Szálkai, Tamás Péter Baranyi, and Luca Szarka E., vol. I (Budapest: Antall József Tudásközpont, 2019), 15–23.

pessimistically and continued even worse. We could witness significant changes, which made us rethink what the new world order really is, the conclusions from 10 years before became outdated and the impetus of new analysis became stronger. The present collection of publication is a good example for that and it intends to reflect on the symbolic 2019 year while also evaluates today's realities. It is also worth to note that the Antall József Center of Excellence's recent book also had this goal.⁶

During the last three decades there were real changes and we could witness events which were not or should have not been a surprise but the common characteristics were that these events changed how we understand the security challenges. Of course the most significant were the series of system changes in 1989 and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. 2001 and the simultaneous terrorist attacks in the United States woke up the world's military superpower from its strategic slumber and the global war on terror emerged as the most important priority of the Western alliance (even though it created serious friction especially due to the invasion of Iraq in 2003). The number of conflicts within the NATO have increased even more after the global financial crisis in 2008-2009 most importantly because the allies ran out of money and the United States realized that it could not bear the burdens alone. Washington decided to pull back, to moderate the American presence and to lessen the costs of the overstretched foreign policy. 2014 is the next turning point because – despite the fact that the allies still struggle with economic problems – the Russian invasion of Ukraine called the attention to the original goal of the NATO and that territorial defense is still valid. Simultaneously in 2015 the

⁶ Kinga Szálkai, Tamás Péter Baranyi, and Luca Szarka E., eds., *Biztonságpolitikai Corvinák*, vol. I-II (Budapest: Antall József Tudásközpont, 2019).

ongoing identity crisis of the EU manifested in the counterproductive political statements and dangerous steps trying to manage the illegal migration crisis. The crisis is still one of the most serious challenge but after 4 years there is still no common ground and no solution at sight even according to the most optimistic commentary. However, it is obvious that we need to rethink the basis of our security also within the EU.

Our region, the EU, the NATO has faced parallel challenges and threats since, too; traditional ones such as the Russian aggression, the growing appetite and presence of China in the world, the failed Iran nuclear deal, or North Korea; and also non traditional ones such as state failure in Africa and the Middle East (largely contributing the new waves of migration), the appearance of the Islamic State and international terrorism in general and the ever growing threat within Europe, still present financial and economic problems in the developed world. It is clear that our existing institutions have not been able effectively control the events. This leads to serious criticism towards the security architecture and the questioning of it is relevance. Consequently the international players have been forced to find alternative solution even if it sometimes drew serious criticism from the allies, see the Hungarian policies to stop illegal migration as an example. It sounds pessimistic but a better and more secure Europe and World is still a distant goal therefore regional cooperation such as the Visegrad Cooperation will have an important role in the coming years.

As mentioned above 2019 is a special year for commemoration. In 1989 Hungary not only chose a new political path but this year let Hungary rejoin the West after that in Yalta took this opportunity

for 40 years. It is true that the last decades were not easy and the road of the political, economic, societal, even cultural transition was bumpy, however, Hungary today is the full and equal member of the Transatlantic alliance and the Western value community despite the fact that unsubstantiated criticism and double standards are still common towards the “new” members. The “new” ones still feel often that it is still worth bearing criticism because the membership gave back opportunities and possibilities, which were lost after the Second World War and with the Soviet “alliance”. Our region regained the momentum to be able to develop along those values and more importantly interests which we share with our Western partners. The Euroatlantic integration has had no alternative. Nevertheless, there will be conflicts, frictions and debates. However, a healthy dialogue rather strengthens the alliance than questions its effectiveness, especially if the “new” ones are equal not only on paper.

Central European have felt some kind of alienation within the club and they also have had the valid feeling that despite the full membership the “new” members are rather second class ones. The feeling of neglect has come back time to time and it is still tangible in many decision processes today, therefore sticking together for instance in the frames of the Visegrad Cooperation is very important. In the 1990s the most important foreign policy priority was alinement to the NATO and the EU which resulted in the acceptance of the rules without much criticism and also the adaptation of the Western institutions according to the Western interests. This resulted in on one hand that the Western allies are not used to strong Central European voice and on the other hand that events and processes in our region have been less important in Brussels and we could not react in time, either. The energy

security and the 2006 and 2009 gas crises are good examples. The energy security and a common position in the EU was not a priority earlier. Probably it is even better example how surprised certain Western members and Brussels were that a “new” member can be so vocal on the illegal migration crisis.

Hungary’s core interest – similarly to the other V4 countries – to be member of the Euroatlantic institutions. Nonetheless, the last 15 and 20 years also proved that the alliance and these institutions can only function effectively if the members are able to present their interests, make their voice heard and equally participate in finding the solutions. Honest dialogue is also in the “old” member’s interest. The Central European feeling of being neglected will definitely not help the smooth development. This is not only true in the EU and NATO but in the bilateral relations with the United States. Due to the serious effects of the global financial crisis the United States decided to turn away from our region and the “pivot to Asia” had clear economic reasons. With the pivot new reflexes were born: since the beginning of the 2010s it became more and more common that Washington openly criticized the allies’ domestic policies and also openly tried to influence them.⁷ From the American point of view we could even justify this change but it is beyond question that the new tone in the American foreign policy could not help deepen the cooperation within the alliance.

It has become obvious the last years that those liberal political and economic institutions which were created after the Second World War and intended to help avoid a new great war are not able to

⁷ “Victoria Nuland az európai és eurázsiai térség ügyeiért felelős külügyi államtitkár beszéde az Egyesült Államok–Közép-Európa Stratégiai Fórumon,” October 3, 2014, <http://ircblog.usembassy.hu/2014/10/03/victoria-nuland-az-europai-es-eurazsiai-terseg-ugyeiert-felelos-kulugyi-allamtitkar-beszede-az-egyedul-allamok-kozep-europa-strategiai-forumon/>.

handle the new problems and provide effective and sustainable solutions. Thus the ideological debate about the existing institutions is not a simple European problem, but it is also present in the international politics. On the other hand, the debate is rather a Western “extravagancy” because many regional powers and international players already abandoned the dysfunctional international frames and suggested new forms of cooperation, think about Russia, or China. The gravest Western dilemma is how long the liberal world order is still able to manage the challenges and despite the problems to maintain the credibility of the institutions. The liberal label gained negative connotation whilst the debate should focus on the reform of the international institutions and not about how the “new” members such as Hungary should change their domestic institutions to fit the best in the clashing institutional frames. Without the “new” members the reform of these institutions is not possible and their voice is really important. Without the development of the reformed structure it is difficult to imagine that the institutions will be able to survive under the growing pressure and facing simultaneous challenges. This ability of reform needs political will but the future of our region, the EU and the Western alliance is at stake.

Since 1989 the Central European needed to adapt quickly to the changes in international politics and because of the forced openness they were very vulnerable at the same time, especially economically. Nonetheless, the “canaries”⁸ were not listened to in the West, the geopolitics stroke back (Kaplan 2013) and the West could not understand the different needs and interests for instance being too close to the civil war in Yugoslavia, and definitely the

⁸ See Wess Mitchell, *The Ties That Bind: U.S.–Central European Relations 25 Years after the Transition* (Washington: CEPA, 2013), 9.

unavoidable influence of Russia in the neighborhood. The EU and NATO expected and even demanded full and quick integration and adaptation of all the Western institutions in exchanges letting in the new members. The serious conditionality let not much room for the Central Europeans than follow the instruction without questioning them. However, the last decade Europe faced significant changes which hopefully make the Western Europeans realize that a functioning EU needs all the members. These hopes are still vague seeing that some politicians blocked the process of the formation of the new European Commission only on selfish and domestic political basis not considering the destroying effects of lengthening the process and deepening the rift between East and West.

Besides the argument for reforming the liberal institutions it is even more clear that the international security architecture is outdated and is not able to answer the new challenges. Not surprisingly it created lot of tension within the Transatlantic alliance. The Cold War ended without forcing the West and the United States to seriously think about the reform of for instance the NATO. Of course it is true that the NATO looked for new tasks proving that there were still need for the formal alliance. In the 1990s after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and more importantly due to the Yugoslav War, the civil wars in Africa it seemed that the West will not face a serious military challenger but the small conflicts create regional security vacuum which was not in the Western interest. The NATO tried to be prepared to go beyond territorial defense and answer the “new security threats”. The paradox of the 21st century lies in this very process: the outdated institutions tried to find new impetus whilst the 20th century’s traditional military threats never disappeared, think

only on Ukraine. It became clear that the institutions are not anymore able to manage the traditional threats, either.

Before the Russian aggression in 2014 – despite the fact the 2008 Georgian War was a very serious proof – it seemed that Fukuyama was right and the history in Europe indeed ended and the West can forget the traditional military conflicts. The EU and the Western powers not surprisingly were shocked, surprised and were not able to find adequate answer for the Russian aggression. The unanimously accepted – but many times criticized – sanctions against Russia rather hurt the European economy and has not proved effective. The parallel other challenges such as the global financial crisis, the illegal migration crisis, or UK's decision to leave even more complicated the otherwise serious situation. Obviously, the EU was too occupied finding the (new) identity and solve the domestic, institutional problems, strengthen the Euro, regain trust and bridge the divide between North and South and East and West.

In 1991 it seemed that Russia intended to return as a full member of the Western institutional system and will accept the rules of liberal international relations. The (European) peace of the 1990s – despite the Yugoslav War – made the West comfortable and probably a bit negligent. It was expected that the hard security challenges were part of the past and the future is to manage the new security threats⁹ and rather to focus on “soft” power.¹⁰ Accordingly the EU and member states paid more attention to use the “peace dividend” rather than accepting the realities and being

⁹ Rada, “Átalakuló biztonsági kihívások”; Rada, “Új típusú biztonsági kihívások”; Rada, “Megváltozó világunk és a biztonsági kihívások átalakulása.”

¹⁰ Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005).

able to reform the security architecture in Europe. In 2019 – or since Donald Trump became president – it is more and more clear that the United States is fed up paying for European security alone. The Russian invasion of Ukraine did not bring back the traditional military threats rather it clearly proved that they never disappeared.

The emerging regional military powers are testing the existing international system and world order.¹¹ Russia cannot be outmaneuvered in Europe, in the Russian near abroad or now in Syria, and obviously has intentions to be more active in other continents such as Venezuela in Latin America. China today seems to be a peaceful superpower without any violent intentions, however, for the neighbors it is already more serious and the Chinese provocation in the South China Sea are part of everyday life and China made it clear that it intends to strengthen its influence in the region. Furthermore, in the Middle East the proxy wars – such as in Yemen – hinder any regional political solution. The Iran deal in 2015 held the hope for a short period that the nuclear threat at least was managed. In 2018 the United States unilaterally left the deal which shows that the deal was not that stable after all.

Many politicians' expectation was not met in 2016 and many were surprised by the political changes in the United States and the earlier unbelievable electoral win of Donald Trump. At the same time similar political processes are ongoing in Europe, too, which could not be seen. The politics and the politicians have got in distance from the electorate and the voters' real everyday

¹¹ Jakub J. Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell, *The Unquiet Frontier: Rising Rivals, Vulnerable Allies, and the Crisis of American Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

problems. The elite politics is not in the interests of the voters who demand significant changes – such as “drain the swamp” in Washington. These changes are necessary and instead of each others criticism the EU needs reforms which pays attention to the special problems of each citizen and not only on the vague liberal “Europe visions” of the Western political elite.

We cannot state that the validity of the Western and European political value system has gone but the recent changes question how universal this Western value system is. The Fund for Peace think tank has published a yearly publication on the functioning of the states since 2005. The failed states index or the fragile states index shows yearly how well the countries performed each year. Of course the criteria system is Western and consequently the list shows how close these countries are to the liberal Western values. The last decade the number of underperforming states and state failure steadily grew, which poses the question whether the world became worse or the Western evaluation criteria is outdated and we should reform it, too, according to the realities. The most recent map¹² shows that only the United States and Europe (and in general the Western world) was able to fulfil the expectations and fit to the Western criteria. This could be flattering but it should rather call for caution. Today we tend to engage in philosophical debates on the real meaning of words such as liberal, democratic etc., but we need to accept that it does not matter at the end whether our system is liberal, or something else if it is not able to manage the new security threats and seizes to exist.

It has been a decade long question whether the United States is still able and willing to fulfill its role as the protector of the Western

¹² J. J. Messner et al., “Fragile States Index 2019,” Fund for Peace, April 24, 2018, <https://fundforpeace.org/2018/04/24/fragile-states-index-2018-annual-report/>.

world and the values. The role Washington accepted after the end of the Cold War. The “America first” slogan and program did not appear only with Donald Trump. There was already strong need to pull back during Barack Obama’s presidency and demand more activity and share of the burdens from the allies. Few would argue that this is the beginning of a new multipolar world. This is for sure not true on the global scale but valid in different regions locally. China is a clear challenger but not strong enough militarily yet, Russia is on the other hand a real military power but the economy is weak and small, today and the next few years hold the last opportunity for Russia to participate in shaping the World. Thus, the United States is clearly the most important and still the only real superpower even if it is more reluctant and more critical.

Donald Trump is often criticized that his foreign policy is unpredictable but it is not true. We can conclude that Washington is tired to be policeman of the World and is fed up with paying the protection of the Western world alone while maintaining the liberal institutions is rather a burden on the American foreign policy. It is understandable that Trump is not sure why the United States should bear the costs of fighting international terrorism and defeating the Islamic State alone whilst the European allies are engaged in shoreless debates about the identity and they are not able to come to a common agreement how to stop the immense flow of illegal migrants. Furthermore, it seems that Trump is also less patient asking the allies in vain to significantly increase their defense budget. There are positive developments in this sense but the road is still long.

Considering these developments we could witness new trends in international politics. The United States intends to decrease the

number of all those activities which are costly and have become more and more reluctant to engage in solving new challenges alone. The American foreign policy clearly overstretched in the 2000s and became tired. Especially, after the 2003 invasion of Iraq Washington gained more criticism than approval. It could not be continued and already George W. Bush tried to find a way out; Obama's main goal was to engage the partners and leave the two battlefronts in Afghanistan and in Iraq. Trump has also looked for new solutions for the dilemma: how to remain in a world leadership position and decrease the burdens and costs on the United States at the same time. In this sense Trump did not begin a new politics rather the foreign policy reflects the American public opinion.

All the arguments above are valid despite the fact that still around 200 thousand American soldiers serve abroad and the United States is still present in all continents. It is also true even though the American troops did not leave Syria after defeating the (formal) Islamic State and killing the leader of the terrorist group. Dealing with the regional challengers Trump decided to engage them and have more intense conversation with them trying to solve bilateral conflicts with them, such as the trade balance and trade questions with China. Trump is not idealist and intending to have better relations with them serves pure American interests.

As it was mentioned earlier the trend reemerged in the 2010s that the international politics became remilitarized and the traditional power politics is a reality again. This also brought as a consequence that generals are again active participants of international diplomacy. Think only on the White House and how many generals served in different positions very close to the president. It is not necessary brand new because after 2001 the American presidents

have followed the tendency and the generals were dominant in the foreign policy decision making process. The military solutions are on the table and diplomacy, international law, or political solutions lost some importance. At the same time the conflicts are also changed;¹³ the number of armed groups increased and the violent conflicts within the states are also more common.

Consequently because the international community was not able to manage the new threats created even more problems. It was not a secret earlier wither that the EU is an attractive goal for those who would like to have a better and richer life, however, 2015 meant a significantly new problem especially because of the scale of the migration. It is even sadder that the EU could not find a solution still.

In 2009 the official American foreign policy position changed and Washington announced that the era of democracy promotion is over¹⁴ and the states are responsible for maintaining stabile political system and control the monopoly of use of force within their borders. However, the so-called Arab spring overwrote the screenplay and plans accepted and agreed earlier in Washington and made it almost impossible for the United States to leave the region. On the other hand even hearing the plans of an American pull out made the regional competitors more confident and encouraged them to test the American red lines.¹⁵

Parallel to the decreasing American possibilities and capabilities Barack Obama forced the allies to bear the costs of maintaining the

¹³ Rada, "Új típusú biztonsági kihívások."

¹⁴ Péter Rada, "A demokratikus fejlődés Rubik kockája," *Sereg Szemle* 9, no. 2 (April 2007): 155–63.

¹⁵ Grygiel and Mitchell, *The Unquiet Frontier*.

international (liberal) order. The Obama era not surprisingly completed remarkable international agreements such as the Paris Climate Agreement or the Iran nuclear deal, even though the United States left them since. Trump believes in bilateral agreements and even tries to convince the adversaries such as Kim Jong Un, and even more so with Vladimir Putin. The withdrawal from multilateral institutions shows the lack of trust in the international institutions and international law in general. Nikki Haley was a strong UN Ambassador between 2017-2018 and after she left and published her memoir it even more obvious that the UN and the multilateral for a is not a first priority for the United States. Most probably we can expect more unilateral foreign policy decisions and steps from Washington.

The EU struggles with the domestic problems and the dysfunctional institutions and the Transatlantic community is in general in an identity crisis. Having said that it is even more understandable the “American first” slogan, and that the United States relies more on the realist self-help. Economic trends shows that in the future the economic investments main target countries will be the United States and China and the EU’s share will decrease steadily. If the EU will not able to reform itself and get over the shoreless debates on the members domestic politics and party politics motivated criticism the future is rather dim. In the meantime China’s economy is still growing faster. China can only profit from a longer crisis period in the EU, let alone the fact that Russia always intended to create tension, the crisis of the Western world is also a comfortable development for Russia. The trends in world politics and the events and processes which govern the international politics are unpredictable and besides the challenges in this dimension we should not forget that there are regionally

conflicts which directly does not affect the future of the World, but they still mean a heavy burden for the international community.

The conflict of the two Koreas is typically such a problem. Even though there were some positive developments such as the meeting of the two leaders and also Donald Trump – as the first American president – also personally met Kim Jong Un, the nuclear threat has not been solved yet and thus the fears of an unpredictable war and steady provocation is still a possibility.

The general developments in the Middle East are not positive either and we cannot have too high hopes for an easy and quick settlement of the hostilities and wars. Leaving the Iran deal will not help in stabilizing the situation either, and also the American decision to move the Embassy to Jerusalem means that the Americans are openly left the position of supporting the two-state solution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Saud-Arabia is a regional power fighting for dominance with Iran which is materialized in the proxy war in Yemen. The Turkish invasion of Northern Syria, Assad's new momentum of maintaining the power, Russia's strong presence and the American contradicting moves will not help find a quick solution.

The Middle East is a typical and general example of the international diplomacy's failure and the individual particular and short term interest's of the states in the region. The Israeli-Palestinian relations is not better and the two state solution is out of sight. A devastating war is still ongoing since 2011 which draw in all the regional players international actors, the United States, Russia, Turkey and many foreign fighters. There has been no peace in Iraq since the end of the Cold War, the country is not stable and probably the only stability comes from the Kurds who are the

enemy of Turkey, Iran and Assad in Syria. The Shia-Sunni conflict horizontally makes the problems even more complex. In Yemen, even though Iran and Saudi Arabia's proxy war is not on the front page of the international Western media, more than 8 million people are on the verge of famine, there is no health care, no central authority.

Afghanistan is still not a solved problem after 18 years, the statebuilding exercise failed.¹⁶ The international community cannot leave the country even though there were many plans and agreements that by the mid-2010s there will be a final solution and the international community will finally leave. The Taliban is still, or again strong, it is very difficult to imagine that without them there can be any kind of political solution. On the other hand letting them into politics questions the whole rationale of the war since 2001. The Islamic State's presence in the Asian country made the Taliban seem to be a moderate force and probably the only organized group which would be able to fight against the extremist Jihadism.

It is also not completely surprising that many other "smaller" conflicts cannot reach the threshold of attention in many cases. The Western countries as it is the general reaction usually condemns the human rights violations on paper or in a statement but nothing really happens later. The ethnic cleansing in Myanmar, the devastating decades long civil wars in Africa, the ungoverned territories of the Sahel where terrorist groups and organized crime groups found home seem to be second class problems. Regionally probably there are solutions but if we think about Nigeria the

¹⁶ Rada, "A demokratikus fejlődés Rubik kockája."

strongest military power in Africa and it cannot defeat the Boko Haram.

After the end of the Cold War it became a common sense that civil wars are not European problems and violent military conflicts are characteristics for Africa. However, since 2014 more than 10 thousand people died in Ukraine and it does not seem that the conflict will be ended soon.

The present collection of publications intends to commemorate our regions' transition in the last 30 years and the fact that in 2019 all the V4 countries are full and equal members of the Transatlantic community. Being member of the West means that the changes of the world and international politics have also effects on our regions and the V4 countries need to accept the role of being responsible allies. On the other hand the double standards need to be ended and the voice of the "new" members needs to be heard by the "old" members. Honest dialogue will help our community develop, the lack of trust definitely will lead to a dim future.

Ontological Security of Central European Countries 30 years after the End of Communism. The Case of Poland¹

Alicja Curanović, PhD

Abstract

The goal of the paper is to establish whether the profound multilevel changes of the last three decades have influenced the historical modes of self-identification of Central European nations. Using Poland as the case study, I analyzed the social reception of the recent Three Seas Initiative which targets Central Europe. The analysis of the content of the discussions which take place on the Polish expert and newspaper on-line domains allows for a reconstruction of the contemporary Polish social geopolitical imaginary. The findings show that despite all the changes of the last thirty years the cognitive and discursive practises shaped over a hundred years ago are still relevant for the Polish geopolitical thinking.

¹ Some thesis of this paper were presented during the seminar “A Hundred Years of Polish East European Policy” at the University of Warsaw, 26 October 2018.

Introduction

30 years after the fall of communism many things look different in Central Europe.² The former members of the Warsaw Pact have regained full independence and joined first NATO, then EU. They all have introduced market economy. Political pluralism, free mass media and civil societies, despite some recent negative tendencies, make a firm part of the social reality in the whole region. The change of geopolitical circumstances, to name just the reunification of Germany, the collapse of the USSR and the dusk of the unipolar order, required from Central European countries to re-think their foreign policy and their role in European affairs. The popular in academia mode of the analysis concentrates on the evolution of foreign policy, usually with the NATO and EU accessions as the turning point. Researchers tend to focus on interests, goals and instruments.

For me, taking a look at foreign policy is an “excuse” to tackle the identity issue. In this paper I use foreign policy analysis to get a glimpse into the self-identification process of the nations. Following David Campbell’s advice I approach foreign policy as a tool to diagnose identity. My goal is to find out whether all the changes which have taking place during last 30 years have influenced the modes of self-understanding of Central European states. Considering the pace and the depth of the changes, one aspect interests me in particular, namely the ontological dimension of security. The ontological security is provided by the sense of historical continuity. The multilevel changes which have taken place during the last 30 years could cause a sense of an interruption

² In this paper the notion of Central Europe refers to the former members of the Warsaw Pact with the exception of post-Soviet republics. Hence the region of Central Europe includes Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria.

or a distortion of a vision of the linear gradual historic development. It is intriguing to see how Central European countries deal with this specific challenge.

Due to the limitations of the paper, I decided to focus on one particular case study. I have analysed the most recent concept introduced by the Polish diplomacy which targets Central Europe - the Three Seas Initiative (TSI). My interest is not as much in the concept itself as in its social perception. In order to reconstruct it, I have analysed the debates which take place on the Polish expert and newspaper on-line domains. It's here where the political ideas usually gain most attention. Using the name of the concept as the key-word (in Polish – *Trójmorze*) I have selected 200 texts within the time frame 2015-2018. The material allowed to reconstruct the Polish social geopolitical imaginary, especially when it comes to Central Europe. The findings show that despite all the profound changes of the last three decades the cognitive and discursive practises shaped over a hundred years ago are still relevant for the Polish geopolitical thinking. It seems that after having achieved two main goals, i.e. joining the EU and NATO, there has been a certain confusion about Poland's identity. The uncertainty about the new roles lowered ontological security which was further weakened by the on-going debates about the judgment over the former communist regime. Dealing with ontological anxiety requires a coherent autobiography, i.e. a story a country (i.e. foremost its elite) tells to itself about its past, presence and future.³ The absence of such a story has triggered in the case of Poland the revival of the old discursive routines rooted in a distant past. Paradoxically, Poland can build own sense of ontological security by 'othering' Germany and Russia and presenting both neighbours

³ Richard Ned Lebow, *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25.

as a source of a potential threat. A state of a permanent threat as a mechanism of soothing ontological anxiety - sounds like a promising academic problem.

The paper starts with the introduction of the concepts relevant for the analysis, i.e. identity, ontological security and their connection to foreign policy. Next I present the Three Seas Initiative and its social reception. The final part of the paper highlights to what extent the old cognitive routines guide today the geopolitical imaginary of the Polish experts.

Identity, ontological security and foreign policy: how does it all add?

Constructivists were the ones who in IR have turned the spotlight on the role of identity in explaining states' behaviour.⁴ They questioned the position of realists who disregarded the identity of individual agents as an object worth a deeper analysis. Realists believed that the structure, i.e. the material division of power, was the single most important factor determining states' actions. The realm of ideas, including ideas about Self were of secondary importance. Under the circumstance of the international anarchy states could survive by maximising their power.

Constructivist, however, made a point that although states do strive for increasing their power, they can understand differently what power is. States, like all social communities, exist

⁴ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nicholas Onuf, *Making Sense, Making Worlds: Constructivism in Social Theory and International Relations* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2012); Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge, UK ; New York; Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Maja Zehfuss, *Constructivism in International Relations: The Politics of Reality* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Carmen Wunderlich, *Rogue States as Norm Entrepreneurs: Black Sheep or Sheep in Wolves' Clothing?* ([s.l.]: Springer International Publishing, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27990-5>.

in a social reality of socially constructed meanings. This, so called, social stock of knowledge keeps being constructed and reproduced by agents and at the same time it constitutes these very agents. In order to understand agents' actions, we should learn about their identities. The ways a state understands Self precedes and influences how this state understands own interests and what kind of goals it wants to achieve in the international arena. In other words, identity should be viewed as a source of a state's foreign policy.

According to Dirk Nabers, identity „supplies an actor with an angle through which to interpret his or her social situation and the expectations of appropriate behaviour that come with it”.⁵ Or, as Ted Hopf put it, identity is „how one understands oneself in relationship to another”.⁶ Hopf emphasises the dynamic and relational nature of identity which is shaped by the mechanism of ‘*othering*’, i.e. learning by the agent about self by determining the difference between Self and the “Other”. In Jean-Frederic Morin and Jonathan Paquin's words: “Identity is formed by transforming differences into otherness”.⁷ The figure of the “Other” plays hence a crucial role in the self-identification process. However, adherents of constructivism differ in opinions about the nature of the Other. Bahar Rumelili is convinced that the “Other” must be external to the agent. It means that identity of a state is always shaped in the process of contacts with the international environment. Ted Hopf presents a different view. He argues that self-understanding of a

⁵ Dirk Nabers, “Identity and Role Change in International Politics,” in *Role Theory in International Relations*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, and Hans W. Maull (London: Routledge, 2011), 83, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203818756-13>.

⁶ Ted Hopf, “Making Identity Count,” in *Making Identity Count: Constructivism, Identity, and IR Theory*, ed. Ted Hopf and Allan Bentley B. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5, <https://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190255473.001.0001/acprof-9780190255473-chapter-1>.

⁷ Bahar Rumelili, “Constructing Identity and Relating to Difference: Understanding the EU's Mode of Differentiation,” *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 1 (2004): 27–47.

state might be formed in relation to inner “Other”, for instance an image of own past (historical “Other”) or a minority which lives within the state, e.g. ethnic, religious or class minority (domestic “Other”).⁸

The focus on identity has raised constructivists’ interest in another issue, namely ontological security. Following the findings of R.D. Laing (1960) and Anthony Giddens (1984)⁹ researchers like Jeniffer Mitzen, Brent J. Steel or Ayşe Zarakol argue that states, like all social collectives, draw own sense of security not only from the physical survival but also from stable identity.¹⁰ Hence there are two dimensions of security: security as survival and security as being-in-time.¹¹ As Aliaxe Kazharski wrote, ontological security is about “depending on preservation of the integrity of the self despite ruptures in established routines, and being able to feel the effect of self-identity and continuity of the biographical narrative”.¹²

In order to be able to act a state must assume the invariability of its existence, the invariability of perceptions about itself, about what it is and what roles it plays among other countries. Brent J. Steel notes that the main source of the sense of ontological security is a stable narrative about the continuity of the state – an autobiographical narrative¹³. In other words, ontological

⁸ Hopf, “Making Identity Count.”

⁹ Catarina Kinnvall and Jennifer Mitzen, “Ontological Security and Conflict : The Dynamics of Crisis and the Constitution of Community,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, no. 4 (2018): 825–35, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0161-1>.

¹⁰ Jennifer Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma,” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 341–70, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106067346>; Ayşe Zarakol, “States and Ontological Security: A Historical Rethinking,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 48–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716653158>; Ayşe Zarakol, “Ontological (In)Security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan,” *International Relations* 24, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 3–23, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117809359040>; Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹¹ Brent J. Steele, “Ontological Security and the Power of Self-Identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War,” *Review of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2005): 526.

¹² Aliaksei Kazharski, “Civilizations as Ontological Security?,” *Problems of Post-Communism*, May 1, 2019, 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2019.1591925>.

¹³ Steele, “Power of Self-Identity,” 519–40.

security comes from a stable narrative about a state's identity. It's important to remember that since identity is a dynamic phenomenon, "stable", in this context, does not mean rigid. "Stable" refers to a coherent autobiographical narrative which a state (its elites) can tell to itself about its past, present and the coming future. What's more, in order to enhance the sense of ontological security, this autobiographical narrative should be accepted also by external "Others".¹⁴ The lack of the external recognition eventually lowers the ontological aspect of security, hence causes ontological anxiety.¹⁵

According to Jennifer Mitzen, the need for ontological security can be so strong that in a situation of conflict between a behaviour ensuring physical or ontological security, the state can choose the latter.¹⁶ This helps to explain the perseverance of the state in conflict roles, even if they harm its physical security. If a conflict with another state has become a part of the identity of a particular state, that state is attached to this role. A change of its role would not only require settling the conflict, but also (perhaps above all) redefining the identity of the state. It is not the type of relationship with the external world (conflicting / peaceful), but the stability of this relationship that gives the state a sense of ontological security. The state experiences its continuity, is convinced of its authenticity, because its habits of perception and understanding of itself and the international environment remain unchanged.

German political scientist Sebastian Harnisch stressed that ontological security of a state might be challenged not only by other

¹⁴ Jelena Subotić, "Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 4 (October 2016): 612, <https://doi.org/10.1111/fpa.12089>.

¹⁵ Christopher S. Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, "Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity," *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (March 1, 2017): 31–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716653161>.

¹⁶ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics," 342.

actors of international relations but also by the absence of a coherent narrative about own past which be broadly accepted by the domestic audience.¹⁷ In order to achieve a sense of ontological security the state must form a strong relation to own historical Self. Achieving this goal usually helps a commemoration of a historical victory. However, it may also happen that a state shapes its relation to own historical Self by commemorating defeats. Sebastian Harnisch warns that the latter case is burdened with the risk of „role-taking trapped in history”.¹⁸

Identity is a crucial aspect of ontological security. And how does foreign policy correspond to these two phenomena? In regard to this issue there are two “camps” among constructivists. The “positivists” focus on seeking causal relations between identity and a state’s actions in the international arena. The “post-positivist” take a step further. For them identity is not a cause but a reason for a state’s behaviour. They are not interested in tracing simple causal dependencies. For them state is not a social fact but it is always in the process of becoming.¹⁹ A state exists as long as it is able to sustain and reproduce the coherent autobiographical narrative. From this perspective, foreign policy is not a set of ideas and actions undertaken by a state in the international area but one of many means to reproducing national identity, providing sense of community and historical continuity. Such understating of foreign policy was proposed by David Campbell.²⁰ According to British scholar, foreign policy does not serve sustaining relations with

¹⁷ Sebastian Harnisch, “Role Theory and the Study of Chinese Foreign Policy: Background and Rationale of the Political Economy of Business Journalism,” in *China’s International Roles* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 11, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203818756>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁹ Sebastian Harnisch, “Role Theory: Operationalization of Key Concepts,” in *Role Theory in International Relations*, ed. Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank, and Hans W. Maull (London: Routledge, 2011), 7, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203818756>.

²⁰ David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).

other countries but its primal purpose is to provide a sense of identity by drawing the dividing line between the national community and the “Other”.²¹ The crucial role in this process plays discourse about national security. By presenting international environment as a dangerous space foreign policy allows to achieve two goals. Firstly, it “glues” together a several million group into a nation. Secondly, it minimize the significance of possible domestic rifts and raptures in face of a greater external threat.²²

Campbell’s perspective highlights the role of foreign policy in the self-identification process. By analysing foreign policy and its social reception we can get an insight into the dynamics of national identity. In the case of Central Europe it enables us to find out how these states, after three decades of so many changes, understand today their role in the region. Saying goodbye to the socialistic past did not happen in a day. The number of necessary changes undertaken by these societies in a relative short period of time brings into the picture the question of ontological security.

Considering the turbulent history of the region the sense of existential continuity seems like a rare commodity. All Central European countries at a certain point lost their sovereignty to their more powerful neighbours (Russia, Prussia, the Habsburg Monarchy or the Ottoman Empire). This loss should be considered the “formative experience” for shaping the sense of common historical fate among Central European nations. It’s neither the language nor ethnicity and not religion but the loss of sovereignty which allows for drawing the boundaries of the region of Central Europe. Milan Kundera was right when he defined Central Europe as a region of mostly small states which were an object of a political

²¹ Ibid., 9.

²² Ibid., 44.

rivalry and all had experienced the loss of sovereignty.²³ Losing sovereignty and statehood is a fatal blow to sense of historic continuity. That's a reason why ontological security of Central European nations have shaky foundations. Recalling Filip Ejdus' work, we could say that these countries make a good case of "mortal nations", i.e. less confident than other states in the eternity of sovereignty.²⁴ According to Ejdus, such nations "usually incorporate fatalistic future self-projections into the narrative of the Self and use it as a source of ontological security. While anxiety of death is an inescapable feature of the human condition, these 'mortal nations' are less capable of coping with it. In these polities, anxiety about political finitude always lurks".²⁵

Poland lost its sovereignty as the last in the region and hence for the shortest period of time – "only" 123 years. What's more, in the case of Poland the loss was not sudden. It was not a result of a military defeat (unlike Czechia, Hungary or Serbia) but happened gradually - 23 years passed between the first and the final partition. Until the first national uprising in 1830-1831 (the so called November Uprising), many thought that it was only a temporary crisis and that the regaining of sovereignty was just a matter of time. Only the defeat of the military struggle sowed the seeds of doubt in Polish people's minds. Eventually, Poland re-emerged together with other countries after the I World War. It was a multiethnic and multireligious state with a significant territory. It was also a weak state with a deep sense of existential threat. The unstable geopolitical circumstances required from Poland confirming constantly its borders, legality of territory - its

²³ Milan Kundera, "Zachód porwany albo tragedia Europy Środkowej," *Zeszyty Literackie*, no. 5 (1984).

²⁴ Filip Ejdus, "Critical Situations, Fundamental Questions and Ontological Insecurity in World Politics," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, no. 4 (March 9, 2017): 883–908, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0083-3>.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 889.

very existence. By showing agency Warsaw had to prove that the Second Polish Republic was not a temporary phenomenon. The “come-back” on the political map of Europe after 123 years of absence demanded from the Polish elites establishing an autobiographical narrative which would add meaning to the disrupted past and provide a sense of community to society whose members had been socialised in three different political entities. Foreign policy played a part in achieving these goals.²⁶ II World War followed by the Cold War and its abrupt end forced the societies of Central Europe to redefine again their identities and adapt their autobiographical narratives. After 1989 joining the UE and NATO was a common goal for the most former members of the Warsaw Pact. Once these goals have been achieved, new discussions started within Central European countries about their roles, future perspective but also about their past. Appeals for a critical evaluation not only of the communistic regime but also of the transformation process have become a part of the agenda of the right wing parties which in the case of Hungary and Poland have gained power.²⁷ Hence after three decades since the fall of the Berlin Wall many (if not all) Central European societies have found themselves in a position with no clear ideas about their new roles in the European affairs or even an accepted by the majority judgment over the most recent past. And although one can hardly consider these circumstances a “critical situation”²⁸, nevertheless,

²⁶ Bartosz Światłowski, “Prometejska racja stanu. Źródła i dzieje ruchu prometejskiego w II Rzeczypospolitej,” *Poliarchia* 2, no. 1 (2014): 153, <https://doi.org/0.12797/Poliarchia.02.2014.02.08>; Jacek Borkowicz, “W poszukiwaniu gwarancji. Prometejski nurt polskiej myśli wschodniej,” in *Określenie Koszykowa*, ed. Jacek Borkowicz, Jacek Cichoński, and Katarzyna Pelczyńska-Nalęcz (Warsaw: PWN, 2007); Marek Kornat, “Ruch prometejski – ważne doświadczenie polityki zagranicznej II Rzeczypospolitej,” *Nowa Europa Wschodnia*, no. 2 (2018): 76–86.

²⁷ Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga, “Introduction: Toward a New Illiberal Conservatism in Russia and East Central Europe,” in *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*, ed. Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga (London; New York: Routledge, 2019), 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351020305-1>.

²⁸ Students of ontological security emphasise the role of “critical situations” which undermine the sense of being-in-time and trigger ontological security seeking behaviour. “Critical situations

problems with articulating a coherent autobiographical narrative at home, has provided a fertile ground for raising ontological anxiety in Central European nations. Problems with shaping a consistent autobiographical narrative should have consequences for their ontological security.²⁹

It's impossible to cover in one paper all Central European countries. Therefore, I have chosen as the case study Poland and its Three Seas Initiative (TSI). One of the goals of this initiative was to find a “niche”, a new role for Poland in the European affairs. By analysing the social reception of the TSI, I aim to reconstruct the contemporary Polish geopolitical imaginary and see whether it differs from the cognitive patterns established over a hundred years ago, when Poland regained its sovereignty.

The Three Seas Initiative: the historical geopolitical imaginary and the contemporary official agenda of the Polish government

Since we are to tackle the issue of ontological security, we should refer to the past. The geopolitical imaginary shaped by the historical experience is an important source of ontological security and hence provides foundations and a framework also for contemporary foreign policy. At this point there is no need for a detailed description of Poland's history. I will present a panoramic overview of the main features of the tradition of the Polish political

are generated by radical (real or perceived) ruptures in established routines of international society”. Ejdus, “Critical Situations.”

²⁹ A reverse phenomenon in regard to Central / Eastern Europe could be observed recently within the EU. As Maria Mälksoo argues that the region has return as an ontological insecurity trope in the discourse of the old EU members. Maria Mälksoo, “The Normative Threat of Subtle Subversion: The Return of ‘Eastern Europe’ as an Ontological Insecurity Trope,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (May 4, 2019): 365–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1590314>.

thinking, which should help to contextualise the today's findings about the geopolitical vision.

Some constructivist, e.g. Iver Neumann and Vincenc Poulliot, argue that histories of particular nations are marked by the so called "formative experience".³⁰ The notion of "formative experience" refers to a period of time or experience that has an important and lasting influence on ideas and attitudes. In the case of Poland, as formative we could consider the first two decades of the freshly regained independence, hence the period 1918-1939. It was during these years that the Polish elites, for the first time in the modern history, could not only debate and wonder about Poland's policy but also could put these ideas to the test, since they finally disposed over institutions of a sovereign state. The geopolitical imaginary of the elites of the Second Polish Republic was marked by the strong sense of an acute insecurity and a conviction about fragility of the geopolitical situation. Another loss of precious independence was feared the most. The elites were in one mind about the hostile environment in which Poland was forced to survive. They differed, however, in judging which of the neighbours presented a greater threat. Two leaders of the political debate took different perspectives. Jozef Pilsudski thought it was Germany – advanced, modern, strong militarily and economically. Roman Dmowski, in turn, pointed to Russia which, in his opinion, represented barbarian imperialism. Both politicians feared the deadly alliance of Germany and Bolshevik Russia which would inevitably bring Poland's existence to an end. It is worth to note that the roots of this particular fear go way back to the November Uprising.³¹

³⁰ Iver B. Neumann and Vincent Poulliot, "Untimely Russia: Hysteresis in Russian–Western Relations over the Past Millennium," *Security Studies* 20, no. 1 (March 21, 2011): 105–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2011.549021>.

³¹ Borkowicz, "W poszukiwaniu gwarancji," 47–48.

Eventually, it was Pilsudski's vision which prevailed. Looking for a way to minimize Russia's threat resulted in many initiatives. One of them was the so called *Intermarium* – an idea developed in the 30s by the minister of foreign affairs Jozef Beck. He proposed to create a federation of nations situated between Germany and Bolshevik Russia, stretching from the Baltic Sea to Black Sea - the "Third Europe".³² The goal behind this idea was to strengthen the region and its agency. Integrated Central Europe was to become an independent agent in the European affairs. It was thought as an alliance against Germany and Russia. But also, it was to strengthen the status of Poland. The *Intermarium* was to fulfil a function of a springboard to re-establish the lost once greatness. Finally, the initiative conveyed a message about Poland's "natural" leadership in Central Europe. Despite the ambitious plans, the *Intermarium* did not bring any notable effects. The II World War broke out and the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact made the Polish elites' worse nightmare come true. The end of war was followed by the imposed alliance with the USSR and another loss of the political independence.

The analysis of the most persistent cognitive and discursive patterns in the traditional Polish geopolitical imaginary reveals a certain paradox. The sensation of the threat coming simultaneously from the West and the East is so deeply rooted in the Polish perception of international dynamics that it has become a stable cognitive routine which might function as a source of ontological security. The situation of the threat and the prospect of a devious alliance between Germany and Russia is "familiar" to Polish self-understanding. In plain words, when Germany and

³² Jakub Lubelski, "Związek Bałtycki i Trzecia Europa. Koncepcje reorganizacji Europy Środkowej w polityce zagranicznej II Rzeczypospolitej," *Nova Europa* 9, no. 1 (2010): 183–217; Piotr Cieplucha, "Prometeizm i koncepcja Międzymorza w praktyce polityczno-prawnej oraz dyplomacji II RP," *Studia Prawno-Ekonomiczne* 93 (2014): 39–55.

Russia are considered a threat, defining Poland's role in Europe comes almost without an effort. For it's not the type but the stability of roles that strengthens ontological security. As paradoxically as it may sound, stirring fears in connection to Germany and Russia might work as a reliable means to sooth ontological anxiety in the case of Poland. A true change of Warsaw's relations with any of these two neighbours requires changing first Polish's self-identification patterns. It's a challenge for Poland and, perhaps, also for other former socialistic countries. All of them have not yet come to terms with their recent past. Just to name the on-going debates about the necessity of lustration, de-communisation, restoring sense of justice etc.³³ What's more, the problem of constructing a consistent autobiographical narrative about own past goes often beyond the issue of the Cold War years. One look at the history texts books in Polish schools allows to notice that the sense of historic continuity is provided through the narrative about the series of the failed uprisings with the Warsaw Uprising (1944) as the most recent and the most important one. Striving to construct a coherent vision of own past by turning failed national insurrections into the central points of the story locks the Polish geopolitical imaginary in a trap of a history, which Harnisch warns about. I will illustrate these arguments by presenting my findings from the analysis of the social reception of the Three Seas Initiative,

In September 2015 the representatives of Poland, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Austria, Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia and Hungary attended a meeting of a format labelled as "Adriatic-Baltic and Black Sea" which took place during the session of UN General Assembly. The talks concerned the

³³ Jo Harper, ed., *Poland's Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism* (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2018), www.jstor.org/stable/10.7829/j.ctvbd8m13.

prospect of a cooperation in the area of energy, transport and telecommunication. A year later, due to the common initiative of Poland and Croatia, the format of such meetings was labelled as “Three Seas”.³⁴ Its first session was held the same year at the end of August in Dubrovnik. The next meeting, co-hosted by Poland and Croatia, took place a year later in Warsaw,. The third round was organized in Bucharest in September 2018. Within the framework of the new initiative 157 projects have been prepared of a value of 45 million EUR³⁵ and with one general purpose: to make Central Europe more competitive in comparison to other regions within the EU .

According to the Polish government, the Three Seas Initiative aims to unlock the dormant potential of Central Europe – an area that makes 28% of the whole EU and 22% in terms of the population. On many occasions the Polish officials made it clear that the initiative was not driven by any geopolitical concerns.³⁶ On the contrary, Krzysztof Szczerski, State Secretary in the president administration, explained that it’s a pragmatic project which is to modernize the region.³⁷ The special priority is the development of transport infrastructure and energy. It should help to attract more foreign investments. Szczerski said: “As far as the Three Seas Initiative is concerned, it’s a notion which is to replace the previous name (i.e. Adriatic-Baltic and Black Sea), since the three seas have different names in different languages. The label “*Intermarum*”, on

³⁴ Agnieszka Bieńczyk-Missala, “Od Międzymorza do Trójmorza – meandry polityki zagranicznej Polski w Europie Środkowej,” *Stosunki Międzynarodowe* 54, no. 1 (2018): 95–115.

³⁵ The most notable result of the TSI are the bilateral agreements which were signed by Poland and Croatia in July 2017. “Jest porozumienie Gaz-System-Plinacro. Współpraca Polski i Chorwacji w gazie,” *Biznes Alert*, July 7, 2017, <https://biznesalert.pl/porozumienie-gaz-system-plinacro-wspolpraca-polski-chorwacji-gazie/>. About the prospect of investments see Martin Sienkiewicz, “Koncepcja Trójmorza w polityce zagranicznej Polski po 2015 r.,” *Dyplomacja i Bezpieczeństwo* 4, no. 1 (2016): 139–51.

³⁶ Sienkiewicz, “Koncepcja Trójmorza.”

³⁷ “Min. Szczerski: Trójmorze nie jest alternatywą dla Unii Europejskiej,” *Prezydent.pl*, September 7, 2016, <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/aktywnosc-ministrow/art,424,min-szczerski-trojmorze-nie-jest-alternatywa-dla-unii-europejskiej.html>.

the other hand, has a strong geopolitical and historical connotation. We want to tighten the regional cooperation, when it comes to economy, infrastructure, but also security”.³⁸ It’s important to note that the initiative is addressed exclusively to the members of the EU. Ukraine was not invited. This fact was emphasised as a proof that the Polish government had no intentions to resurrect old geopolitical ideas but was dedicated to pragmatic modernisation.

If taking the declarations of the Polish government at face value, we could say that the project indeed seems pragmatic. There is no geopolitical motivation, no ill ambition on Warsaw’s side to become the regional leader. On the contrary, there is a conscious rejection of the old ideas in order to create a new quality in the region. However, the social perception of the initiative among the Polish experts and commentators is much different and reveals the persistence of cognitive-discursive routines formed way back in the beginning of the 20th century, or earlier.

Come what may, fear the neighbours! The Reactions of Polish experts to the Three Seas Initiative

In order to learn how the Polish experts perceive the Three Seas Initiative, I analysed the texts which concern this topic and were published on the Polish websites. I started my research not from selecting particular websites but from searching for all the sites which mention the key-word “Trójmorze”. This approach allowed to select a broad spectrum of portals, including online editions of well established news magazines („Rzeczpospolita”,

³⁸ Ibid.; “Minister Witold Waszczykowski w rozmowie z Radiem dla Ciebie,” Rzeczpospolita Polska, Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych, accessed November 12, 2019, https://www.msz.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/msz_w_mediach/minister_witold_waszczykowski_w_rozmowie_z_radiem_dla_ciebie;jsessionid=FCBCEA3E296D89C64727F69873BE0AA0.cmsap1p.

„Gazeta Wyborcza”, „Polityka”, „Teologia Polityczna”, „Myśl Polska”, „Polska. The Times”), expert discussion fora (np. Puls Biznesu, biznesalert.pl), papers made available by think-tanks (np. Fundacji Batorego, Fundacji Kazimierza Pułaskiego), websites of the Polish community abroad, conservative and right-wing groups (e.g. Jagiellonia.org, Kresy24.pl, PCh24.pl, niezalezna.pl, konserwatyzm.pl, prawicarzeczpospolitej.org, fronda.pl), as well as blogs (Salon24.pl). One glance at the mentioned websites shows that Three Seas Initiative was not debated much by leftists.

I have decided to base my research on the materials from the Internet because I wanted to see not only the opinions of experts (it happens so that the experts are the social group which is the most engaged in commenting political initiatives) but I also hoped to gain access to representative of the broader society by analysing the comments posted under the articles. All in all, I analysed over 200 texts, which allowed to identify the main features of the Polish international imaginary. Below I have described my main findings.

Among the online expert community the only ones who shared the understating of the initiative as presented by the government were the commentators from the websites of a business-economic profile. They see TSI mostly as a project aimed at modernization of the region³⁹. The absolute majority of the commentators, however, perceive it as a geopolitical project which continues the tradition of the *Intermarium*. Most of the authors stressed that the project should be pragmatic. The voices who favoured the “messianic” edge were marginal.⁴⁰

³⁹ See Michał Kleiber’s comment at the Baltic Business Forum: “Koncepcja Trójmorza: Polska może zyskać gospodarczo i naukowo,” *wGospodarce.pl*, August 26, 2016, <http://wgospodarce.pl/informacje/28851-koncepcja-trojmorza-polska-moze-zyskac-gospodarczo-i-naukowo>.

⁴⁰ Jan Malicki, the head of the Eastern Europe College at the University of Warsaw expressed a conviction that Poland should not resign from attempts to formulate initiatives which would be more about politics and ideas and less technocratic. He admitted that he personally considers

The commentators differ in how they evaluate the current situation in Central Europe. Those who think of TSI as a modernization project, emphasise the significant dormant potential of the region which with some help could become an important local center of development.⁴¹ For people who view TSI as a step towards a geopolitical reconstruction, Central Europe is struggling with the semi-peripheral status imposed partly by “German colonisation”.⁴² This very group is also concerned with the “geopolitical fatum” which historically overshadows Central Europe. Last but not least they perceive Russian imperialism as a realistic threat. The anonymous blogger from Salon24 writes: “We have found ourselves in unenviable economic situation. From both sides, West and East, we face powers which, for some time already, strive to achieve a ‘natural’ goal, i.e. shape an alliance”.⁴³

The internet-users who consider TSI a geopolitical project are divided about the main source of the threat in Central Europe. In other words, they agree that the initiative is aimed against other states, but they differ in naming these states. The analysis of the posts reveals five possible interpretations. Hence, Three Seas is against (1) Germany (which is often identified with the whole EU), (2) against Russia, (3) against Germany and Russia, (4) against Germany and Russia with the US as Poland’s patron. The interpretations number 3 and 4 are founded on the assumption that there is a secretive traditional anti-Polish Berlin-Moscow

the *Intermarum* a dream which could still come true. “Eastbook: ‘Musimy ograniczyć rolę Polski w Trójmorzu’ – rozmowa z Janem Malickim,” January 24, 2018, <https://studium.uw.edu.pl/eastbook-musimy-ograniczac-role-polski-w-trojmorzu-rozmowa-z-janem-malickim/>.

⁴¹ Michał Kobosko, “Michał Kobosko: Koncepcja Trójmorza ma sens,” *Rzeczpospolita*, December 16, 2016, <https://www.rp.pl/Publicystyka/312159879-Michal-Kobosko-Koncepcja-Trojmorza-ma-sens.html>.

⁴² “Koncepcja Trójmorza. Czy to ma sens?,” *Bumerang Polski*, June 23, 2017, <https://www.bumerangmedia.com/2017/06/koncepcja-trojmorza-czy-to-ma-sens.html>.

⁴³ “Trump, jego rewolucja a wschodnioeuropejskie Trójmorze,” *Salon24.pl*, July 5, 2017, <http://paxpolonica.salon24.pl/791125,trump-jego-rewolucja-a-wschodnioeuropejskie-trojmorze>.

alliance.⁴⁴ The last, fifth interpretation has an anti-Semitic connotation. It assumes that the initiative is American-Jewish intrigue which aims to create American-Jewish protectorate in this part of Europe. It's worth to stress that this particular comment was found on a portal called Christian Poland (Polska Chrześcijańska).⁴⁵

Most of the internet users perceive Three Seas as a means to oppose foreign influence. Hence, they are convinced that it's a counter-hegemonic project. Many texts argue that the initiative is in fact Poland's response to the Nord Stream II⁴⁶; it's a reaction to the attempt to create the multi-speed EU⁴⁷ or to the devious process of German economical colonisation of the region.⁴⁸ The popular perception of the Three Seas as a counter-hegemonic project indicates that Polish internet users view the whole region as a space under pressure of the external powers.

The prominent plot in the narrative about TSI concerns security of Poland and Central Europe. Fear appears as an important premise of a regional cooperation⁴⁹. One of the acknowledged political commentators, Eugeniusz Smolar, quoted the following statement of the Polish ambassador to Kiev, Jan Piekło. The diplomat called Three Seas "an initiative of Central

⁴⁴ "Dr Targalski: Trójmorze bez Ukrainy, a z Austrią, to ukłon w stronę Rosji," July 7, 2017, <https://televizjarepublika.pl/dr-targalski-trojmorze-bez-ukrainy-a-z-austria-to-uklon-w-strone-rosji,51004.html>.

⁴⁵ "Donald Trump zdecydowanie poprze zainicjowaną przez Polskę koncepcję Trójmorza," *PCh24.pl*, May 20, 2018, <https://www.pch24.pl/donald-trump-zdecydowanie-poprze-zainicjowana-przez-polske-koncepcje-trojmorza,60382,i.html#ixzz5RMCxTvny>. About TSI as a tool of building US hegemony but with no anti-Semitic connotations writes also Juliusz Krzysztoforski, "Po jasną cholere to międzymorze?," *mPolska24*, September 21, 2017, <https://www.mpolska24.pl/post/15239/po-jasna-cholere-to-miedzymorze>.

⁴⁶ "Donald Trump."

⁴⁷ Even Szczerski admitted it. "Min. Szczerski."

⁴⁸ "Wielomski: Zwrot geopolityczny? O Trójmorzu," *Konserwatyzm.pl*, July 29, 2017, <https://konserwatyzm.pl/wielomski-zwrot-geopolityczny-o-trojmorzu/>.

⁴⁹ Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski, "Trójmorze – kontekst europejski i atlantycki (1)," *Niezależna*, July 9, 2017, <http://niezalezna.pl/101954-trojmorze-kontekst-europejski-i-atlantycki-1>.

Eastern Europe which fear Russia”.⁵⁰ Andrzej Zyberowicz is convinced that we are already witnessing a “hybrid war against Poland”.⁵¹ Włodzimierz Iszczuk from the journal „Głos Polski” sends a serious warning: “the most probable arena for a military operation in the coming world war is Central Eastern Europe”.⁵²

The analysis of the discourse shows that most users paint a grim picture of the most powerful neighbours of Poland. Germany is called a hegemony and a colonial power whose goal is to carry out own project of *Mitteleuropa*. An anonymous blogger argues that Germany’s policy aims to “de-industrialize and depopulate our country by creating a mass unemployment which forces people to leave Poland”.⁵³ What’s more, the image of Germany is strongly connected to the image of EU which by many commentators is considered to be right now “under German diktat”. The EU itself is often presented as plunged into crisis and moral downfall. Dominik Szczęsny-Kostanecki refers to the EU in a following manner: “Confused, suffocated by numerous regulations, less and less democratic, and hence less and less recognised as legitimate by own population; larded with Muslims immune to acculturation; possessed with own ideology which was meant as a weapon against conservative (traditionalist) thinking but has become a grenade dropped among own troops.... The EU, shocked constantly by terrorist attacks surpassing 100-200 thousands death toll, lives in a state of a permanent fear”.⁵⁴ It’s impossible to miss the contrast

⁵⁰ Eugeniusz Smolar, “Polska nie jest liderem,” *Liberté!*, July 8, 2017, <https://liberte.pl/polska-nie-jest-liderem/>.

⁵¹ Agaton Koziński, “Andrzej Zybertowicz: Trójmorze to nie projekt antyunijny. Przeciwnie, ma wzmocnić UE,” *Polska+*, July 7, 2017, <https://plus.polskatimes.pl/andrzej-zybertowicz-trójmorze-to-nie-projekt-antyunijny-przeciwnie-ma-wzmocnić-ue/ar/12246763>.

⁵² Włodzimierz Iszczuk, “Tarcza Europy,” *Portal Społeczno-Polityczny Jagellonia.org*, November 28, 2014, <https://jagellonia.org/tarcza-europy/>.

⁵³ “Trump, jego rewolucja.”

⁵⁴ Dominik Szczęsny-Kostanecki, “Projekt Intermarium a klęska europejskiej federacji,” *Portal Społeczno-Polityczny Jagellonia.org*, September 6, 2016, <https://jagellonia.org/projekt-intermarium-klęska-europejskiej-federacji/>.

in the image of the EU and Russia. The former is referred to by one of the internet users as “dying old prostitute”⁵⁵, while the later is presented most of the times as a fearful and powerful actor. Russia’s actions are perceived as aggressive, expansionistic and imperialistic. Włodzimierz Iszczuk calls Russia “an aggressive empire of evil” and argues: “after losing the cold war Russia was forced to retreat from Central Eastern Europe. It does not mean, however, that she was ready to accept own defeat. For the last 25 years, she has been preparing to take revenge”.⁵⁶ A noticeable group of the internet users perceives Russia not only as a military but foremost a civilizational threat.⁵⁷

The US comes as the only country which by internet users, especially those from the right wing-conservative milieu, is referred to as a partner and guarantee of security in Central Eastern Europe (the only exception is the anti-Semitic comment). For political scientist Adam Wielomski, Donald Trump is the harbinger of the long awaited “cultural counterrevolution against the unbridled liberalism”.⁵⁸ Remarkably enough, despite the “global village” phenomenon the geopolitical imaginary of the internet users comes down to three actors, i.e. Germany, the EU and Russia. China appears incidentally as a potential partner but also a certain risk.⁵⁹

The internet users are split about the role Poland should play in its immediate neighbourhood. Most believe that apart from the considerable territory Poland does not have necessary

⁵⁵ Krzysztoforski, “Po jasną cholerę to międzymorze?”

⁵⁶ Iszczuk, “Tarcza Europy.”

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ “Wielomski: Zwrot geopolityczny?”

⁵⁹ Michał Specjalski, “Specjalski: Branding Trójmorza [Analiza Szczytu Trójmorza i Global Forum 6-7.07.2017],” *LinkedIn* (blog), July 11, 2017, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/specjalski-branding-tr%C3%B3jmorza-analiza-szczytu-i-forum-specjalski>.

resources to become the regional leader.⁶⁰ Especially, that the countries participating in the Three Seas Initiative show certain mistrust towards Warsaw's ambitions.⁶¹ Any attempt to speak in the name of the whole region will undermine Poland's diplomatic initiatives. Merely as a far echo of the historical past appears an opinion of some commentators that by strengthening the regional cooperation Poland would enhance own status within the EU.⁶² Krzysztof Szczerski argued: „having own vision [...] enables us to bring an original idea to the debate about the post-Brexit future of the EU. It's obvious that Germany has taken over the political initiative, with the personal engagement of Angela Merkel. But there is still no new vision. A fresh vision, a new concept will provide Poland with a leverage within the EU”.⁶³

The most surprising, at least to the author of this article, was to discover the “civilizational” plot in references to the Three Seas Initiative.⁶⁴ According to some commentators, in face of Western Europe's decay and aggressive, barbarian Russia, Poland (together with the region) is predestined to become the defender of true European values and the whole Latin civilisation. Like the Biblical Ark of the Covenant Poland should preserve the true identity of Europe. Nothing more, nothing less. It's remarkable that in this context there are comparisons of the EU to the old Roman Empire.

⁶⁰ Smolar, “Polska nie jest liderem.”

⁶¹ Some examples of the external reactions: Croatia, “Miloszević: Trójmorze to koncepcja o wymiarze transatlantyckim (ROZMOWA),” *Biznes Alert*, September 6, 2017, <https://biznesalert.pl/miloszevic-trojmorze-koncepcja-o-wymiarze-transatlantyckim-rozmowa/>. Austria, Aureliusz M. Pędziwol, “Austriacki dyplomata: Trójmorze to inicjatywa infrastrukturalna, nie polityczna,” *Deutsche Welle*, July 11, 2017, <https://www.dw.com/pl/austriacki-dyplomata-tr%C3%B3jmorze-to-inicjatywa-infrastrukturalna-nie-polityczna/a-39630402>.

⁶² Adam Leszczyński, “Szczerski: ‘Trójmorze to napęd Europy’. Wraca idea Trójmorza i Międzymorza, fantazja o polskim mocarstwie,” *OKO.press*, June 20, 2017, <https://oko.press/szczerski-trojmorze-naped-europy-wraca-idea-trojmorza-miedzymorza-fantazja-o-polskim-mocarstwie/>.

⁶³ “Min. Szczerski.”

⁶⁴ About the „civilizational” dimension of the TSI writes also Adam Balcer. Adam Balcer, “Trójmorze – myślenie życzeniowe czy Realpolitik?,” *Forum Dialogu*, October 14, 2017, <https://forumdialogu.eu/2017/10/14/trimarium/>.

Poland together with Central Eastern nations is depicted as Byzantium which survived the “barbarian flood” and manage to preserve the civilizational heritage. In Andrzej Zybertowicz’s opinion, “the countries of Central Europe are now the guardians of Latin civilization”.⁶⁵ According to a blogger of the portal Salon24, “The cooperation in the area of economy, infrastructure, energy, and last but not least, political-military is the key to create Three Seas. The initiative is about forming a North-South alliance in the Central Eastern Europe which shares the values of the western civilization”.⁶⁶

Another variation of the “civilisational” plot is the conviction that Poland and the region must take upon the role of *Antmurale Christianitatis* and protect Europe from the aggressive Russia. Poland should again become “the shield”. Iszczuk argues: „The Three Seas Initiative should become an reliable shield of European civilization and the whole free world”.⁶⁷ It’s worth to note that among the studied materials I have found just one which though of Central Europe’s location between two civilization (West-Russia) as a disadvantage. The author argued that because of the two different influences the region can’t truly unite.⁶⁸

The “civilizational” plot includes also references to Poland’s moral superiority in comparison to both, Germany and Russia. Dominik Szczesny-Kostanecki while writing about TSI, argues that Poland “will never strive for an unconditional hegemony, because... it is neither characteristic for Polish people’s nature nor a part of

⁶⁵ Koziński, “Andrzej Zybertowicz.”

⁶⁶ “Trump, jego rewolucja.”

⁶⁷ Iszczuk, “Tarcza Europy.”

⁶⁸ “Nasz Dziennik – Dr Kawęcki: Nowy Ład Europejski,” *Pravica Rzeczypospolitej*, July 7, 2017, <http://prawicarzeczypospolitej.org/aktualnosci,pokaz,1835>.

the Polish political tradition – even the one symbolised by Pilsudski. Poland aspires only to the role of *primus inter pares*”.⁶⁹

The analysis of the material allows to reconstruct also the specific understanding of the Polish history. According to internet users, Poland’s history is characterised by the unstoppable cycle of crises. The repetitive nature of catastrophes in a twisted way adds to the existence of the Polish state an “ahistorical” dimension. This specific vision of the past influences the idea of the future. Most internet users are pessimistic. They foresee new crises and find the collapse of the EU quite possible. Some even go that far to call to prepare for the third world war.⁷⁰ It seems impossible for Central Europe to escape the *Fatum* of geopolitics.

30 years later: everything has changed, nothing has changed?

In the begging of the 21st century Russian intellectuals were still occupied with finding a remedy to national identity crises. They looked jealously to Central European countries which after 1989 were free of the dilemma of self-identification. Most of the former members of the Warsaw Pact could form their new identity in contrast to the recent history (interpreted as the Soviet diktat) and with the notion of “return to Europe”.⁷¹ While these words are being written, Poland is a member of the EU and NATO. In both institutions Warsaw cooperates with Germany – the country which until the end of the communistic regime was considered a deadly enemy. In the North and East Poland borders with Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine – three countries, which according to Pilsudki’s vision were to play the role of a buffer protecting Poland from Russia. A hundred years have passed since Poland regained

⁶⁹ Szczęsny-Kostanecki, “Projekt Intermarium.”

⁷⁰ Iszczuk, “Tarcza Europy.”

⁷¹ Tanya Narozhna, “State–Society Complexes in Ontological Security-Seeking in IR,” *Journal of International Relations and Development*, October 23, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-0164-y>.

independence, and thirty since re-establishing its full sovereignty. Many things have changed. It's enough to mention the fall of the USSR, the end of the Cold War, the enlargement of EU and NATO, the growth of China. The volume and significance of these changes stand in striking contrast with the durability and immutability of the geopolitical imaginary of the Polish experts in regard to its neighbours. Constructivists would explain it by pointing to the importance of identity, especially social actors' attachment to cognitive and discursive routines.

The conducted analysis allows to observe three differences in Poland's perception of Central Europe. Firstly, unlike after 1918, it is hard to find prominent intellectuals who while perceiving Germany as the main threat would at the same time call for a rapprochement with Russia.⁷² To a certain extent, this absence of the pro-Russia party in Warsaw is a result of the still unsettled issue of the plane crash which happened in Smolensk in 2010.⁷³ The second change is connected to the perception of Poland's role in the region. The number of commentators who doubt their homeland's capacity to become the local leader and a mentor is increasing. However, the dream of reviving the glorious past of the European power is not completely absent either. The third differences is connected to the role of the guardian. Traditionally it was reserved for France which was now replaced by the US.

The most important neighbours, i.e. Russia and Germany, are cast in their traditional roles. Although it was the government of Angela Merkel which insisted on sustaining sanctions against Russia after 2014, many Polish internet users believe in the

⁷² The exception refers to the text written by Bohdan Piętka for „Myśl Polska”, B. Piętka, op. cit.

⁷³ While still in office, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Witold Waszczykowski, said: „...the keys to improve Polish-Russian relations are in Moscow. The wrack of the plane is one of such keys”. “Minister Witold Waszczykowski.”

existence of the traditional anti-Polish alliance of Germany and Russia. The membership in NATO of both Warsaw and Berlin does not preclude thinking of Germany as striving to fulfil own hegemonic project and turn Poland into its vassal. This image of Germany resurfaced in some comments especially after Berlin had declared interest in joining the Three Seas Initiative in August 2018. The MP and the member of the ruling party, Prawo and Sprawiedliwość, Beata Pawłowicz, in the interview for the portal *niezalezna.pl* said: “I think that each situation, each initiative, which Germany wants to join, turns automatically into a situation which should be very carefully observed in regard to Poland’s national interest. Never does Germany do anything selflessly. Never does Germany get involved in projects which don’t suit its interests. And it happens so that Germany’s interest was always about weakening Poland and any powerful subject which could emerge between Germany and Russia. These are Germany’s eternal political interests. Today’s initiative to join the Three Seas - personally, I would approach it very warily. I could support some form of a cooperation with Germany but only to extend it serves Poland’s interest. Maybe some technical issues or *know-how* in the sphere of labour organization. However, never should Germany have any decision-making capacity or any impact on political arrangements within the Three Seas’ states. Let’s not forget that Germany is the eternal ‘murderer’ of Central European countries”.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Luiza Dołęgowska, “Czym grozi udział Niemiec w projekcie Trójmorza? ‘To powinno zapalić u nas wszystkie czerwone światełka,’” *Niezależna*, August 31, 2018, <https://niezalezna.pl/234649-czym-grozi-udzial-niemiec-w-projekcie-trojmorza-to-powinno-zapalic-u-nas-wszystkie-czerwone-swiatełka>; Piotr Lewandowski, “Trójmorze na niemieckiej smyczy,” *Ilustrowany Tygodnik Polskę*, October 2018, <https://ilustrowanytygodnikpolski2.blogspot.com/2018/10/trojmorze-na-niemieckiej-smyczy.html>; Zygmunt Korus, “Trójmorze – Polacy wpuszczają dobermana,” *Nasze Blogi* (blog), August 29, 2018, <https://naszeblogi.pl/51307-trojmorze-polacy-wpuszczaja-dobermana>.

It's important to notice the difference in the kinds of threat which the Polish commentators attribute to Germany and Russia. The former is thought to have an ambition to create own colonial system based on the economical exploitation of Central Europe. Russia, we could say traditionally, presents foremost a physical threat to the existence of Poland and the Latin civilization which Poland is to guard. Within this narrative framework Germany is depicted as a superior, technologically more advanced power which, nevertheless, belongs to the same Western civilization. Russia, on the other hand, is the embodiment of an alien barbarous culture. Russia is Poland's significant "Other" which keeps being orientalised. These practises of "othering" and orientalization help to legitimate Poland's own civilizational belonging to Europe, or the West. In the case of Poland, the security discourse which plays such an important role in reproducing identity through foreign policy, is strongly connected to Germany and Russia.

The analysis of the gathered material shows that in the beginning of 21st century Germany and Russia are attributed with the same roles as hundred years ago. Ontological Security Theory helps to explain this considerable stickiness of historical images. After the successful 'return to Europe', i.e. joining NATO and EU, Poland faced a new challenge – to determine own identity within the European Union. The lack of consensus among the Polish political elites about the mid- and long-term strategy in foreign affairs resulted in lowering the sense of ontological security. This situation, in turn, made old cognitive and discursive routines characteristic for Poland's self-identification process again attractive. Reproducing stable, autobiographical narrative in the case of Poland feeds on "othering" and fearing both Germany and Russia. Paradoxically, the situation of a threat from both sides might be the most familiar to Poland's identity. And it's not the

type of roles but their stability which brings sense of ontological security. Fearing German colonisation and Russian aggression is the most familiar “environment”. Seeking ontological comfort in well rooted images of external threats is stimulated also by the lack of a coherent vision of own past. After 30 years since the Round Table Talks the Polish society is divided in its judgment about the communistic regime and the mode of transformation. The ongoing debates whether the Round Table was a “rotten compromise” or the “wisest thing the Polish elites ever done”⁷⁵ shows the depth and complexity of the dispute. The call for restoring justice is one of the main motives of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. Let’s recall again Harnisch’s remark that the lack of a stable relation with the historic Self favours reviving historical images. In the case of Poland, it locks its geopolitical thinking in a historical trap.

The references to the decaying Europe and the clash of civilization in which Poland plays the role of *Antemurale* has also its roots in the past. Remarkably enough, the critic of ‘old Europe’ as demoralised and Godless, compared to the ancient Rome, makes the narrative of Polish commentators resemble the Russian conservative turn.⁷⁶ Poland is to be the shield which protects the Latin civilization from Russia, while the latter is the shield which protects the whole exploited world from the Western hegemony. Both countries emphasise own moral superiority. Poland sees itself as the messenger of the free world. Freedom is also the motive of

⁷⁵ Ewa Dąbrowska, “New Conservatism in Poland: The Discourse Coalition around Law and Justice,” in *New Conservatives in Russia and East Central Europe*, ed. Katharina Bluhm and Mihai Varga (London; New York: Routledge, 2019), 92–112, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351020305-1>.

⁷⁶ Alicja Curanović, “The Guardians of Traditional Values: Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church in the Quest for Status,” *2014-15 Series*, Transatlantic Academy Paper Series, no. 1 (February 2015), <http://www.gmfus.org/file/5315/download>; Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, “A New Russian Conservatism: Domestic Roots and Repercussions for Europe,” *Notes Internacionals, CIDOB*, no. 93 (June 2014), https://www.cidob.org/en/content/download/56914/1464415/version/2/file/NOTES%2093_MAKARYCHEV_ANG1.pdf.

the discourse which serves “othering” Russia and draws the dividing line between free Europe and Poland as its guardian and Russia – non European autocracy. This image of Poland as a fighter for freedom and democracy is strictly connected to Russia. It’s enough to mention that US’s imperialistic policy never seriously bothered Poland and China’s autocratic practices never stop Warsaw from developing bilateral economic cooperation. The relations with Russia, to be more precise, not any relations but tense and fuelled with conflict, are a part of Poland’s self-understanding; a part of its ontological security. Paradoxically as it may sound, Poland loads its ontological ‘battery’ in an efficient way, when it fears Russia and Germany. Under these circumstances Poland’s Self is the easiest to determine. This observation welcomes a question whether Poland can be “true Self” without fearing its neighbours. This question may sound naïve after the annexation of Crimea and Russia’s military involvement in Eastern Ukraine. However, it’s important to point out that during 13 years which preceded these events there had never been in Poland a serious initiative to create a mode of cooperation for Warsaw, Berlin and Moscow, or a regional initiative which would include Russia. Such an initiative, should it ever appear, would present a challenge to the cognitive and discursive mechanisms well rooted in Poland’s self-identification process. They would undermine mechanisms of viewing Germany as a ‘devious coloniser’ and Russia as a ‘barbarous aggressor’.

There are many factors which influence today the Polish geopolitical thinking. Including identity and ontological security in the analysis of this state’s behaviour reveals the significance of the cognitive and discursive practises shaped, in some cases, over a hundred years ago. A consensus within the elites is needed to overcome the historical entrapment of the geopolitical imaginary.

Also a pinch of political courage is required to dare to let go the traditional security discourse. Working out a consistent vision of the most recent past would be the first step in the right direction. By 'working out' I don't mean a top-bottom initiative decreed by the government and announced to the people of Poland but rather a constructive debate motivated by the sense of common interest. Having presented the Polish dynamics, it would be interesting to see how other Central European countries have dealt with ontological anxiety during the last three decades. Have the access to the EU and NATO resulted in their case also in relying on the narratives rooted in history? This question, I believe, presents a new promising area of research for IR students.

Small and medium – sized states as an integral part of North Atlantic Treaty Organization and their importance for NATO

Dominika Trubenová – Jaroslav Ušiak¹

Abstract

The article is dealing with the importance of small and medium – sized states for North Atlantic Treaty Organization. NATO as a security complex created by 29 European and north American states incorporates also small states which are, naturally, not as strong (military wise, economic power wise, etc.) as bigger states. So the question to ask is what is their importance in such a big alliance? How do they manage to complete the tasks given to them by the alliance itself? Therefore the aim of this study is to point out the importance of small and medium-sized states to North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The following study tends to analyze the acquisition of small and medium-sized states to NATO by using Visegrad countries and other small states as an example using domestic and foreign literature including monographs and studies.

Key words: *V4 countries, NATO partnership, NATO, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, security, opportunities and challenges, small states, medium sized states*

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Introduction

The current forms of the world can look for challenges both in other countries and in international communities that combine their goals. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization /Alliance as a (mainly) military-political group of 29 countries all around of Europe and of course, engaging the US with Canada. Looking at people who are not able to miss their diverse possibilities, other benefits may also be used. There is no question in this case - is there a "small" decision by states? If you want to learn more about safety and complex functioning, then can a large scale be achieved? Is it not for their incorporation into this state? The question of the current membership of small and medium-sized countries in the North Atlantic Alliance is highly advantageous and has many dimensions.

The presented study aims to briefly explain the importance of the Alliance and, consequently, the importance of individual - small and medium - sized states, which are an indivisible and necessary part of the Community of both regional and global importance, using a few examples of such states as NATO members. Subsequently, authors focus on the V4 countries as small and medium-sized states and the potential threats to them from NATO membership. The conclusion of the study deals with the case of the Slovak Republic as a small state successfully incorporated into the North Atlantic Alliance and the challenges / opportunities arising for Slovakia.

Many domestic and foreign authors deal with the security sector and security structures, as well as the issue of small states in international structures. Scientific works of authors such as Amadeo, Krejčí, Eichler, Grizold and many others have been very beneficial in this study by multiple points of view on this agenda. By analyzing the set issues present in both domestic and foreign

works, it is possible to deduce the state of the issue and thus create a profile of the position and participation of the small and medium sized states within the North Atlantic Alliance. At the same time, by deducing it is possible to set out the challenges for small and medium-sized Member States that arise for them from membership in an international organization such as the North Atlantic Alliance.

Historical context of NATO formation and connotations for today

The world destroyed in World War II immediately after its end worked in a kind of security vacuum and without any guarantees. The peace and individual demands of the countries or the recovery steps have yet to be formed, but Western Europe has begun to feel the need for security guarantees. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) also considered steps for the future on security and defense issues. As Holubová states in her book, *“the post-war period was characterized by profound structural changes also in the balance of power between traditional Western democracies and the emergence of a socialist system”*.² The dynamics of the development of relations and individual attitudes of the winning countries in this period showed quite quickly the future direction of the international environment. As was clearly clear, the peace talks in Yalta and Potsdam did not prevent the alliance from being split and previous allies became two antagonist blocs. This incompatible spectrum of views ultimately led to the division of Europe by the so-called Iron Curtain (after 1948). However, if we look at the previous events, between 1945 and 1948, the action of the United States and the United Kingdom was inherently uniform, or the individual steps were mutually respected.

² Mária Holubová, *Dejiny veľmoci v rokoch 1914–1945* (Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov, 2012), 114.

However, the USSR, on the other hand, at the time led by Stalin, was increasingly showing signs of deviating from common declarations and objectives. There was a split between capitalism and communism, which was also declared in individual speeches of statesmen “*If Stalin, in his February speech, indirectly identified capitalism with war, Churchill made a reference to appeasement in March that Western powers should not give way to him as they once did in the case of Hitler.*”³ It was this fact that underlined the whole situation at the time and the need for a security guarantee. It was the ambition of the US and other countries to associate under NATO’s leadership that appeared to be the most rational step to protect against undesirable influences, at that time the openly labeled USSR influence. However, an important fact was that the Alliance enrolled members in its ranks regardless of their “war” past, meaning that “*NATO as an institutional community brought together winners and losers from World War II.*”⁴

Based on the mutual consensus of the Western Bloc countries, the founding treaty of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was signed on April 4, 1949 with the aim of associating countries based on democratic foundations and at the same time as protection against the influence of the USSR and the ideology of communism.

Anglo-Saxon Approach

Since the end of World War II, the Western European states, led by the United States of America, have had a firm idea of the functioning of the world and the organization of international order in the name of peaceful development and cooperation of states and post-war reconstruction. America, in particular, focused on this goal, as “*US foreign policy adhered to the principles of the Atlantic*

³ Pavol Petruf, “Atlantická poistka” (Bratislava: Ministerstvo obrany Slovenskej republiky, 2000), 13.

⁴ Jan Eichler, *Mezinárodní bezpečnost v době globalizace* (Prague: Portál, 2009), 59.

Charter and counted on the post-war cooperation of the winners on the basis of mutual trust'.⁵ As the development of events later showed, the USSR decided to pave the way for post-war functioning, so *"the US must take the lead in the" free world "to stop the spread of communist power"*.⁶

Thus, all the attention of the Western world has been on the one hand on the US leadership and on the other hand on effective assistance to states while balancing or detaining communism. This primary goal of the Alliance is also supported by Amadeo in his article, claiming that the main task was to protect member countries from USSR troops.⁷ Within the range of measures, the Truman's and Monroe's doctrines were among the most important,⁸ that were closely related to the above objectives. The next and very important step, which showed the attitude of the Western countries, and at the same time definitively confirmed the intention to associate countries in order to achieve and maintain collective security, *"in the second half of 1948 the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany and the establishment of a permanent military union in the Western world. In July 1948, negotiations began between the US, Canada and the states of the Brussels Treaty"*.⁹ These continual actions by Western countries led to the signing of the Washington Treaty on April 4, 1949, and thus to the emergence of NATO as a collective security organization.

⁵ Petruš, "Atlantická poistka," 9.

⁶ Peter Terem, *Vplyv EÚ a NATO na európsku a globálnu stabilitu a ich význam pre bezpečnosť SR* (Banská Bystrica: UMB, Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov, 2016), 71.

⁷ „NATO's primary purpose was to defend member nations against troops in pro-communist countries“ (Amadeo, 2018).

⁸ Truman's Doctrine - March 12, 1947 - the doctrine of detention of communism; Monroe's Doctrine - June 5, 1947 - Economic Assistance to European Countries for Post-War Reconstruction - Countries of the (later) Eastern Bloc refused to force the program, which was a definite sign of the USSR's impact and the division of Europe (Terem et al., 2016).

⁹ States of the Brussels Treaty - United Kingdom, France, Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Terem, *Vplyv EÚ a NATO na európsku a globálnu stabilitu*, 72.

Russia's perspective – response on NATO initiative

Russia has long since aspired to be a strong country, a regional power and a player of global importance. Such a position also includes the expansion of the territory, culture and other attributes, including strengthening the position of the military and armed forces.¹⁰ At the end of World War II, the Russian Empire joined the victorious powers and thus participated in meetings and negotiations on the further direction of the world and political organization. Although the negotiations were in the spirit of a peaceful order, there was a conflict with the Western world, whose countries were subsequently concentrated under NATO's heading after 1949. This step has raised conflicting views and worries in the eyes of Russia. They began to feel the need to focus on building their own sphere of security as a response to the creation of the North Atlantic Alliance.

In 1955 the Warsaw Pact organization was established, bringing together the countries of Central and Eastern Europe under the leadership of the Soviet Union¹¹¹². *“It was formally a reaction to the establishment of the Western European Union and the Paris Agreement allowing the Federal Republic of Germany to join NATO. In fact, however, the aim was to consolidate the USSR's control over the Eastern bloc.”*¹³ Thus, although the primary aim of this grouping was to synchronize the policies of the countries and thus create a functional system of collective security in the eastern

¹⁰ “In February 1946, J.V. Stalin's speech spoke about the need to build an armed industry and the necessity of a conflict between capitalism and socialism. He stressed the need for a rapid economic recovery of the country to prepare for this conflict.” Ibid., 70. Even at that time, even this manifestation showed a split opinion on the future of the world, which was subsequently reflected in the division of Europe by the Iron Curtain.

¹¹ In abbreviation – „USSR“

¹² Specifically, these included Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the Democratic Republic of Germany, Poland and Romania.

¹³ Dagmar Hoscheková, *Bezpečnostné komplexy: bezpečnosť na európskom kontinente* (Banská Bystrica: Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela, Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov, 2011), 31.

part of the world, this union was often attributed with “*aggressive, expansive character based on aggressive communist ideology*”.¹⁴

On the other hand, before the signing of the treaty in April 1949, however, the USSR addressed a memorandum to the Western governments in which they openly expressed their dissatisfaction with the Alliance and at the same time that the establishment of NATO severely violated signed treaties with Russia (USSR). In general, therefore, we can say that through the eyes of Russia - it was "provoked" by the West to take individual steps and thus to the subsequent creation of the Warsaw Pact. Also, “*the present theoretical work classifies the emergence of the Warsaw Pact and thus the institutionalization of bipolar antagonism rather than a crisis, emergency solution, a way out of the imbalance*”.¹⁵ Although the creation of the Warsaw Pact¹⁶ as a step towards addressing the emerging imbalance situation, it was able to maintain its existence throughout the Cold War. Although it was a uniting element in the given period, it did not avoid problems and inconveniences¹⁷ that later led to the disintegration of the WP, were not avoided. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, there is also a break-up of WP and subsequently the end of the existence of the USSR itself.

Relations between Russia and the North Atlantic Alliance itself have undergone evolution and various changes over the years, whether there were negative or positive situations that shaped this relationship. Nowadays, the international community is experiencing tensions between the two actors, stemming mainly from NATO's further eastward expansion, while “*Russia has*

¹⁴ Jana Lasicová and Jaroslav Ušiak, *Bezpečnosť ako kategória* (Bratislava: Veda, 2012), 202.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ In abbreviation – „WP“

¹⁷ This includes, for example, interventions in Hungary, the CSSR, and the coup in Poland, as well as social and economic problems and the backwardness of countries compared to the West.

criticized NATO as a remnant of the Cold War and continues to ask who this alliance is aimed at.¹⁸ However, the fact remains that NATO, as a security grouping of European countries along with the Atlantic countries, remains a “thorn in the eye”, while “*the current National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020 points to the unfounded existing global and regional architecture NATO-oriented Euro-Atlantic area*”¹⁹

Thus, as in the past, Russia still longs to hold a firm position in the international sphere, while at the same time participating and actively forming part of the European Security Agenda. It is the creation of the Alliance that raises skepticism and fears of further expanding the membership on the Russian side, leading to various political steps, as we can see today. Pressure is increasing and further attention will need to be paid to individual factors and events that result in the formation and change of the relationship between an important contemporary international player such as NATO and the Russian Federation, which in the eyes of ordinary people remains the successor of the extinct USSR.

The importance of the Alliance for member countries and its basic functions

Although there was no counterpart as the Warsaw Pact Organization in the post-Cold War era, the justification for maintaining the Alliance's existence is still visible today and is still seen as a very important component of the global political and security sphere. It continues to prove its important position in deploying forces in peacekeeping operations in many regions of the world, as well as a subsidiary for other organizations. Finally, it

¹⁸ Alena Budveselová, “Historické postavenie Ruska v systéme európskej bezpečnosti,” in *Bezpečnostné fórum 2014*, ed. Jaroslav Ušiak, Jana Lasicová, and Dávid Kollár (Banská Bystrica: Belianum, 2014), 432.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 433.

should not be forgotten that the group of States is, by its common strength, a greater competitor than each individual State would be.

In essence, the North Atlantic Alliance is an organization that forms the essential part of a stable security environment in Europe and the entire transatlantic environment based on developing democratic institutions and a commitment to peaceful conflict resolution. It also relies on the United Nations Charter for the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and Article 1 of the founding Washington Treaty which states that any international dispute must be resolved by actors “*so as not to jeopardize international peace, security and justice and refrain from threats in their international relations. force or use of force in any way incompatible with the objectives of the United Nations*”.²⁰

At the same time, in accordance with Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, the Alliance serves as a transatlantic forum for consultation between Allies on any issues affecting the vital interests of its members, including the development of an international environment that may ultimately jeopardize their security interest.

In addition to its primary objective - to secure and maintain peace and peaceful functioning in the world - the Alliance's activities are committed to many other goals, namely:

- providing deterrence and defense against any form of aggression against the territory of any NATO member state
- this function or capability is also referred to Article 3 of the Washington Treaty, while Member States will maintain and develop both individual and collective capability to resist armed attack;²¹

²⁰ *Průručka NATO* (Brussels: Office of information and press, 2001), 563.

²¹ Jiří Fidler and Petr Mareš, *Dějiny NATO* (Prague: Pásek, 1997).

- maintaining a strategic balance in Europe - Articles 1 and 2 of the Treaty - actively engaging in the creation of a stable and peaceful functioning of the world together with the development of democratic structures and institutions, while promoting cooperation for the development of countries;
- maintaining sufficient military force to prevent wars and maintain effective defense - building up the armed forces of each Member State that are interoperable and compatible with each other and capable of deploying operations in the event of peace threats or the need to restore them;
- creating the ability to deal with crises affecting the security of its members - partly linked to the aforementioned Article 3 of the Treaty but also to the following Article 4 - this provides for joint consultations in case of threats to Member States;
- supporting in an active way for dialogue with other nations and a cooperative approach to European security issues - we see this goal as a priority in functional partnership programs with many countries around the world, p.ex. the Mediterranean Dialogue, the NATO-Russia Council or the creation of many specifically oriented and assembled groups; this can also be supported by measures aimed at making progress on arms control and disarmament.

Based on the Alliance's primary objectives and activities mentioned above, we can define its core functions:

- protective and defensive function - the primary function on which the whole existence of the Alliance is based, and that NATO is working to create a collective security system that works on peaceful and democratic principles with the active participation of all its members in order to prevent conflicts

while protecting the territory of the Alliance from attacks by third countries;

- developing function - each member country has the right to development, while the Alliance promotes cooperation between countries, while at the same time demands a degree of development for successful functionality through active member contributions.

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The importance of small and medium-sized states for NATO

Although it may seem that membership of small²² and medium-sized states in an organization as NATO is just a continuation of policy without pursuing a larger goal, the opposite is true. Although it is known that contributions to the functioning of the Alliance and hence the development is not identical in all countries, all countries are still partners that make up the organization as a functioning and important whole in the current international environment. However, it is necessary to realize that “*the issue of small states, their usually limited power potential, as well as the ability to realize their foreign policy goals, has its specifics, resulting not only from their economic capabilities but also other determinants of international relations / political, military, security, demographic, geographic, and more/. These are the determinants that determine their position in the world political system*”.²³ So looking at the

²² When it comes to small states, it should be remembered that “*a small state cannot ensure security on its own resources and that it must rely quite fundamentally on the assistance of other states or institutions.*” Dalibor Vlček, “Postavenie malých štátov v svetovom politickom systéme – ich niektoré špecifiká,” in *Bezpečnostné fórum 2014: zborník vedeckých prác*, ed. Jaroslav Ušiak et al. (Banská Bystrica: Vydavateľstvo Univerzity Mateja Bela; Belianum, 2014), 338. At the same time, Krejčí claims that small states are those “*whose lack of power does not allow them to participate in creating a European balance*” (Krejčí, 2009, p.319) and also that “*small states are successful in world politics only when they become proclaimers of the interests of the great powers*”. Oskar Krejčí, *Geopolitika stredoevropského priestoru. Pohľad z Prahy a Bratislavy* (Prague: Professional Publishing, 2009), 319; 323.

²³ Vlček, “Postavenie malých štátov v svetovom politickom systéme,” 337.

function of these states in the organization, based on historical development, we can define a number of reasons.

The first and perhaps the most important and often mentioned reason is an ideological factor. The Alliance is united under democracy and peace, led by the United States (which “pushes” democracy policy through NATO law) and its main feature is to operate on the basis of the democratic values of society and the state. In the past, the priority was to suppress communist ideology. The ideological background of democracy in the world is the largest compared to the past, and part of democracy is also the association and cooperation of states, which goes hand in hand with security.

Another, no less important factor is the geographical importance of expanding NATO membership. As Article 10 of the Washington Treaty foresees, the Alliance continues to pursue an open door policy and embraces all countries that can contribute to the development and maintenance of collective security. At the same time, the impact of the Alliance is important in this factor. The Alliance includes Western European and Central European countries, with the gradual inclusion of the Balkan countries. Geographically, almost all of Europe is covered, from its northern parts to the southernmost, from terrestrial to coastal states. It is this factor that is important for both operational and new partnerships - NATO is able to function thanks to small / medium-sized states²⁴ in a large number of types of environments which makes it (NATO) more important.

If we look at the potential of these states, it is clear that these states are often constrained by their own power of the economy, by the amount of GDP, or by many other factors. But “*especially small states are usually less of a threat to their neighbors and often have*

²⁴ On the other hand, small states will be able to prevent and face possible threats, in particular on the basis of international cooperation and thus NATO membership. Krejčí, *Geopolitika střeoevropského prostoru*.

*a greater degree of loyalty from their own citizens” and at the same time, “small states can prosper economically better”.*²⁵

But what undoubtedly remains an advantage and a pulling power of individual states is specialization. In his paper, Vlček described this ability of small states as “*The role of an expert: as it is difficult to influence a wide range of problems, they try to focus on a specific area and become excellent experts in it*”.²⁶ Although small states (quite naturally and logically) cannot meet every single requirement,²⁷ there will always be experts and specialists who ultimately excel in a number of other nations, so that countries can stack together the full spectrum of specialists and expert groups needed for the Alliance to operate under any conditions and successfully meet its goals and requirements of the international environment. We see this advantage most in the armed forces and military groups operating under the flag of NATO. Small and medium-sized states are not able to typologically cover all military units, but specialize in specific capabilities and knowledge, which in turn contribute greatly to peacekeeping in the world.

If we look at the specific cases of small NATO member states and their significance - besides Slovakia, it is possible to find them. Burden in his work, he analyzes Albania (also marginally mentioning Croatia, as it joined the same year) as a case study, which itself became a member in 2009.²⁸ This example shows the contribution of small states to the Alliance, the fulfillment of commitments and active participation in the tasks. We can also

²⁵ Vlček, “Postavenie malých štátov v svetovom politickom systéme,” 339.

²⁶ Ibid., 340.

²⁷ This fact is also confirmed by Krejčí when he specifically says that “*The Czech Republic and Slovakia have little power potential. Although it is comparable to each other and also to Austria and Hungary, but it is negligible when compared with Germany, Russia, but also with Ukraine.*” Krejčí, *Geopolitika stredoevropského priestoru*, 338.

²⁸ Brandon Burden, “NATO’s Small States: Albania as a Case Study,” Naval Postgraduate School, 2016, https://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/51657/16Dec_Burden_Brandon.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

mention the example of Slovenia in an article by A. Grizold, who argues that “*by working together, by pooling resources, by specialising, even the smallest countries can contribute to the military capabilities of NATO – and Slovenia will not be an exception*”.²⁹ Urbelis points to the example of Lithuania, Denmark and, indeed, the Baltic States, on which he builds its study of how small states are successful in NATO structures - on the example of Denmark, specifically as one of the most successful states in operations of International Crisis Management.³⁰ These are some of the many examples of small European states that have successfully integrated and perform tasks alongside larger and stronger European states.

Potential threats and opportunities to the V4 countries arising from NATO membership

As the V4 countries are relatively small states and do not have a directly named enemy, the threats to these countries stem primarily from changes in the international environment. The current change in the security situation is mainly due to Russia's position and change in the nature of its external behavior, developments in the Balkans, and the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East.

Looking back at the past years and the evolution of Russia's position, we can clearly observe the increasing aggression in both speeches and proceedings. A groundbreaking, negative point in Russia's actions is in particular the events in Ukraine since 2014 and later also the gathering of force along the borders with NATO member countries. In this we see the greatest threat from Russia -

²⁹ Anton Grizold, “NATO and the Contribution of Small States,” *Politico*, November 20, 2002, <https://www.politico.eu/article/nato-and-the-contribution-of-small-states/>.

³⁰ Vaidotas Urbelis, “The Relevance and Influence of Small States in NATO and the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy,” *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 13, no. 1 (2015): 61–78, <https://doi.org/10.1515/lasr-2015-0004>.

its military strength and size, as well as its ability to react quickly and often inadequately. As the V4 countries are neighbors/ the nearest States to Ukraine, it is more important to closely monitor the situation and maintain stable and consistent positions with other NATO countries in the event of joint action against Russia. However, tensions do not seem to diminish so soon, as many analysts have said that the current tensions between Russia and the West have been greatest since the Cold War, and that is why the V4 must remain prepared for any possible evolution in this relationship as full members of the Alliance.

Development in the Balkans means, on the one hand, the integration of countries into NATO (which is, however, a positive factor) and, on the other hand, the persisting inter-ethnic conflicts. Let us mention, for example, the constant problem with the issue of Kosovo and its recognition both by Serbia and by the rest of the world. In the past, there have been many major conflicts, including the beginning of the First World War. It is not in vain that this region is called a “barrel of gunpowder” and has been perceived as a hotspot in Europe. It was created mainly by sharpening and growing nationalism among the Balkan states. Therefore, the direction of the region will be very questionable in the future, but its integration can be a stabilizing element. Bugajski speaks of the Balkan region in the eyes of America as a threat to regional stability and European integrity, identifying the Russia's presence in the region as the main reason, and stressing the need to avoid the escalation of the situation.³¹ The region may be a threat to the V4 from the perspective of Article 5 of the Treaty in the case of a conflict; we can also mention the geographical proximity and the fact that there are several Visegrad communities in the region; and,

³¹ „*To prevent a dangerous spiral of escalation*” Janusz Bugajski, “Balkan Security and U.S. Strategy,” CEPA, January 22, 2018, <https://www.cepa.org/balkan-security-and-us-strategy>.

last but not least, the V4 Armed Forces in missions in the region cannot be forgotten.

In today's world ranking of economic powers, the US and China are at the top two. As forecasts and analysts' statements show, China as a potential world power may overtake the US in the coming years. World media, such as The Diplomat, The National Interest and Forbes, are also expressing a change in the balance of power between the two countries, with the phrase "*China beats US in global leadership*" increasingly ringing. The key, in this case, is the magnitude of the force and the speed of the country's development. As we can see, the pace of economic development in China is becoming rapid and slightly unpredictable, and therefore the possible first position of the economic power in the world is increasingly closer to that country. In the case of overall power, it is also important to mention its assertiveness, which is also increasing - the more it becomes more involved in international affairs and expresses its positions, compared to its past, when it focused primarily on its internal political affairs. Although China has a fairly good relationship with the V4, also thanks to its many investments, its possible further economic and thus complex power growth may affect the power structure in the world and thus may trigger changes in NATO positions. If we look at this in a comprehensive way, in the case of a negative view of this factor, it may be essentially a cycle: China will become a world leader - a change in power structure - a change in NATO's response to China and possible negative steps against China's growing assertiveness - threatening good relations with the V4 and thus threatening the economy. So it is basically a closed circle, which may not happen, but as forecasts, as we have already mentioned, show that China's position change is highly anticipated in the coming years.

In addition to Russia, the Middle East and the possible change in China's position, the Islamic world is also of greatest concern to ordinary people, while the (violent) spread of their religion - terrorist attacks are becoming synonymous with a security threat. The threat of terrorism is now seen as a global problem, and it is „*the deliberate use of violence to create fear and to force public administrations or society to do or not to do something. The aims of terrorism are ideological, religious or political in nature*”.³² The threat is not based on geography or the attractiveness of the environment for V4, but stems from the unpredictability of these activities, since all past attacks have occurred in several European cities and it is not possible to predict their future occurrence as well as individual time spacing between them. The fact remains that “*the European Security Strategy has made terrorism one of the key threats to Europe's security. Terrorism is a strategic threat to the whole of Europe*”.³³ As Kristian also states in his article, there is no strict rule to define a country more vulnerable to the threat of terrorism.³⁴ Rather, it is the nature of the population - its composition, and the author of this article indirectly touches on the issue of migration and population mixing as one of the possible reasons for the terrorist threat. For example, Switzerland or Ireland are relatively safe in this perspective. From this point of view - homogeneity of the population is a factor that reduces the risk of this threat, but in the V4 countries, for example in Slovakia, anti-terrorist units are created, which should play an important role in preventing attacks in the territory.

³² Eichler, *Mezinárodní bezpečnost v době globalizace*, 172.

³³ Vladimír Tarasovič, Róbert Ondrejcsák, and Eubomír Lupták, eds., *Panoráma globálneho bezpečnostného prostredia 2003–2004* (Bratislava: Inštitút bezpečnostných a obranných štúdií Ministerstvo obrany Slovenskej republiky, 2005), 293, <http://www.cenaa.org/data/cms/panorama-2004-20051.pdf>.

³⁴ Bonnie Kristian, “Many European Countries Have No Terrorism Problem. Why?,” *The Week*, July 18, 2017, <https://theweek.com/articles/703673/many-european-countries-have-no-terrorism-problem-why>.

Globalization “*is a dynamic process, removing barriers and wiping borders, linking states and continents, and creating a whole new framework for international security relations*”.³⁵ However, if we look at globalization in the context of security, it can inherently contribute to the emergence of security risks or threats. Returning, for example, to the threat of terrorism, in today's globalized world it is much easier and faster to spread, as countries and their systems are interconnected, there is free movement (if it is an EU), and an attack in all other NATO / EU countries are hit by all others countries along with a rapid increase in threats. This can also be understood through Fukuyama's concept of globalization as the end of history – “*we are at the end of history because there is only one system that will continue to be dominant in world politics and that is the liberal system of the democratic West*”.³⁶ With this statement, we go back to the greatest "enemy" of today's terrorist-oriented groups - Muslim – the liberal democracy and liberal rules that unite the countries of Europe, which of course include the V4 countries. Globalization and interconnection of the world is one of the reasons why several V4 security measures have been taken in the V4 territory. So, naturally, the V4 feels more vulnerable in a globalized world though, on the other hand - which is paradoxically, safer.

The impact of environmental problems on the evolution of the international environment will increase in the future as the face of the world is changing and there are increasing problems p.ex. with the availability of drinking water, the drying up of watercourses, but also the increasing incidence of natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods and many other environmental problems. These environmental problems, especially as regards the

³⁵ Eichler, *Mezinárodní bezpečnost v době globalizace*, 99.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 101.

availability of drinking water and watercourses, often increase into conflicts over these resources. However, unfavorable living conditions may also have an impact on the growth of migration, which, in addition to natural conditions, may also be caused by the state of war in the country of origin (at present we mean the situation in the Middle East). We are currently watching, experiencing and trying to cope with the great refugee crisis, where millions of people are flowing into Europe with the prospect of a better life. Their goal is mostly western countries and the V4 countries are mostly transit countries only. However, it should be noted here, although the V4 is not the aim that “*uncontrollable refugee waves with the possibility of going into criminal activities in this territory pose a security risk*”.³⁷ Migration-related criminal activities include, for example, smuggling (multiple cases recorded); theft and looting or antisocial behavior (incapacity and resulting problems). However, if we compare the impact of the migration phenomenon on selected V4 countries - for example Slovakia with the situation in Hungary, we find that the situation is diametrically different and in Hungary migration represents a far greater security threat than in Slovakia and brings problems to the internal political functioning of the state along with an increase of xenophobic tendencies.

Another potential threat is the growing disintegration tendencies in Europe, currently represented mainly by the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, as well as the debated issue of Catalonia's separatism. Under the Security Agenda, we understand the greatest impact of this disintegration process on the impact on the EU's ability to generate battle groups to respond to individual crisis situations. The British Army has an estimated 150,000 active soldiers and a defense

³⁷ Petruf, “Atlantická poistka,” 65.

budget of around \$ 55 billion.³⁸ But what happens when they leave the Union? The balance of power will change, the volume of possible funds will be reduced, and therefore the requirements for individual contributions may increase, which may also have a negative impact on the V4 countries. It is therefore quite possible that in the future the mandatory obligation will grow to more than 2% of GDP and this can have a disastrous impact on the state of the economy and on the development of the V4 armed forces.

At the present time, we see a great demand within the Alliance for the ability of individual armies to cooperate together, and there are other obligations that follow. Although the variation of technology and thus the issue of commitment can be seen as a potential negative, it can also be viewed as an opportunity for the armed forces of the V4 countries. Due to changes in the international environment, it is necessary to pay increased attention to the arming and material equipment of the armed forces so that they can effectively fulfill the set tasks in the context of collective defense and in connection with changes in the security environment. In essence, we can even understand this as a kind of motivational element.

Another attribute that should be emphasized is the motivation of small states' citizens to be responsible for the security environment of the state in order to develop national awareness in them with an emphasis on their willingness to defend their homeland. Raising this awareness could be ensured by various civil-military activities, in which the security situation and possible development scenarios, with an emphasis on civilian involvement, would be brought closer to the general population (as not everyone is interested in watching TV or news reading). It is important that

³⁸ "Najväčšie vojenské mocnosti. Pozrite si 15 najsilnejších armád sveta," *HN Slovensko*, March 7, 2017, <https://hnonline.sk/svet/922401-najvacsie-vojenske-mocnosti-pozrite-si-15-najsilnejcich-armad-sveta>.

the armed forces of states also have active support in the ranks of ordinary citizens who could help defend their country if necessary. Again for comparison, the example of Denmark is shown, where the emphasis is also placed on the system of civil-military cooperation. A. Dalgaard-Nielsen in her study, she describes several aspects of the Danish environment that have triggered the need for civilian and military cooperation - for example, mentioning terrorism, natural disasters, and various other threats. It emphasizes training, education and information sharing. She refers to this cooperation as an increasingly important component of maintaining national security.³⁹

The current position of the US in NATO is putting increasing emphasis on the development of the EU capabilities and capabilities. How we can see since the arrival of D.Trump in the chair of the US President, USA is increasingly talking about reducing contributions to NATO⁴⁰ to the level of 2% of GDP, with Europe taking responsibility for its security itself. It brings more responsibility to the states of Europe, who should try to rely on themselves, their troops, skills and knowledge. Interestingly, the downward trend in US contributions is already mentioned by Hrivík in his contribution from 1997 and that “*a significant signal is also the significantly declining amounts that the US is planning to invest in NATO enlargement, including the modernization of the armed forces of new members*”.⁴¹ There is also a demand for V4

³⁹ Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, *Culture of Cooperation? Civil–Military Relations in Danish Homeland Security*, DIIS Working Paper, 2006/2 (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2006), https://www.diis.dk/files/media/documents/publications/2_adn_culture_of_cooperation.pdf.

⁴⁰ Zeneli also commented on this topic in his article for The National Interest, describing why Europe can no longer rely on US funding. Valbona Zeneli, “Why NATO’s European Members Can No Longer Expect America to Pick Up the Bill,” *The National Interest*, November 26, 2017, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-natos-european-members-can-no-longer-expect-america-pick-23351>.

⁴¹ P. Hrivík, “Integrácia Slovenskej republiky do bezpečnostných štruktúr” (Bratislava: Stála konferencia slovenskej inteligencie Slovakia plus, 1997), 25.

countries to increase its quality, which can contribute to increasing collective security, especially for European countries. However, this must be seen not as an obligation but as an opportunity to improve and thus improve their position and competitiveness, so that the armed forces can increasingly and better represent V4 on international grounds and present itself as a reliable and strong partner with modern armed forces.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to demonstrate, based on the analysis, the justified need to integrate small and medium-sized states into the North Atlantic Alliance as full members. Although small states are weaker players on their own, on a world map integrated into transnational complexes such as the North Atlantic Alliance, they can perform tasks effectively and continuously and thus contribute to the maintenance of international order.

As could be seen in the study, there are several examples of states where it is possible to confirm the need to integrate such countries into the Alliance - these countries excel in their specialization and specifically targeted characteristics, which make these states irreplaceable parts of this security complex. Also thanks to such partially oriented member states, NATO is able to respond to the changes that the present world and present international environment is bringing more and more often.

We have shown in the study based on analysis that the membership of small and medium-sized states in the Alliance is a legitimate element that helps maintain the stability of the Euro-Atlantic environment. At the same time, the study revealed several challenges, but also threats to the Visegrad countries, which are examples of small and medium-sized countries.

Nowadays, it is questionable how the international community will evolve in the future in such a strongly interconnected and globalized world, the fact remains that small and medium-sized states are and will be important partners in security structures such as NATO. However, there are many obligations for the V4 countries arising from this partnership, an important aspect is the challenges and opportunities that the rapidly changing environment brings. Among the most important challenges with regard to the security of the Alliance and the States themselves, are, for example, civil-military cooperation with an emphasis on support from the national population, as well as the importance of modernizing the V4 armed forces for their interoperability with the armed forces of other Member States in the missions of the international crisis management, which ultimately goes hand in hand with the amount of contribution to the Alliance.

However, at the same time, we shouldn't forget about many emerging threats to which the V4 must respond flexibly, in cooperation with other partners. In the future, it appears that changing China's position, as well as the increasingly assertiveness of the Russian Federation, can bring changes in the international environment, which may affect states' security in a negative direction, whether in the military-political dimension or in the economic dimension at the same time. Terrorism and disintegration tendencies are equally important concepts that will need to be increasingly addressed and at the same time preventive plans and activities of states will be needed to maintain security.

Therefore, it can be said that the continual expansion of the Alliance to include new members - especially small and medium-sized states - is beneficial and necessary for its functioning nowadays and also in the future, as the evolution of the security

environment is difficult to predict, and to meet the new challenges, it is necessary to maintain a stable environment with the assistance of all participating states, which inherently include small and medium-sized states such as V4.

Brief history of V4 defense cooperation until 2014 – the ride on the rollercoaster (but not exceeding speed limits)¹

Marek Madej*

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 (primarily International Visegrad Fund, which is not a political body). 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. 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

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 Visegrad 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).

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 abandoned³.

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

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.

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 member⁴. Hence, after two decades of development, V4 largely remained to be what it 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 – 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 –

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 Slovaks stayed exclusively with post-Soviet Mig-29s. John Blocher, “Conditions for Visegrad Defense Cooperation: A Transatlantic View,” *Foreign Policy Review* 6 (2011): 40–64.

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 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 development⁶. Significantly, such high-

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-communicue-of-the>; Robert Kupieccki, “Visegrad Defense Cooperation: From Mutual Support to Strengthening NATO and the EU. A Polish Perspective,” CEPA Report, no. 35, April 2, 2013, 2–3.

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.

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, disproportionately larger than others input and therefore help to fill technical, operational and industrial V4 cooperation with the assets that V4 states were seemingly scarce of⁷.

Table 1. Main high-level meetings of V4 countries devoted exclusively or primarily to security and defense related issues in years 2012-2014

Place and date	Level	Format	Final document
Bratislava (Slk), 9.12.2014	PMs (HOGs)	V4	<i>Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the Deepening V4 Defence Cooperation</i>
Budapest (Hun), 24.06.2014	PMs (HOGs)	V4	<i>Budapest Declaration of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on the New Opening in V4 Defence Cooperation</i>

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 possibilities of training special forces in jungle environment was discussed (surprisingly, taking into account possibility 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-cwiczy-c-w-brazylijskiej-dzungli>.

Visegrad (Hun), 14.03.2014	MODs	V4	<i>Long term vision of the Visegrad Countries on deepening of their defense cooperation;</i> <i>Framework for an Enhanced Visegrad Defense Planning Cooperation</i>
Budapest (Hun) 14.10.2013	PMs (HOGs)	V4	<i>Joint Statement of the Visegrad Group Heads of Government on Strengthening the V4 Security and Defence Cooperation</i>
Bratislava (Slk),18.04.2013	MFA's	V 4	<i>Declaration For a More Effective and Stronger Common Security and Defense Policy</i>
Warszawa (Pl), 6.03.2013	MODs	V4 + Weimar Triangle (Fra, Ger)	<i>Joint statement Cooperation in developing Capabilities, Solidarity in Sharing Responsibilities</i>
Gdańsk (Pl), 20.02.2013	MFA's	V4 + Nordic + Baltic states	<i>Co-Chair's Statement (Polish and Swedish MFA's)</i>
Litoměřice, (Cz), 3- 4.05.2012	MODs	V4	<i>Joint Communique</i>
Prague (Cz) 18.04.2012	MFA's + MODs	V4	<i>Declaration Responsibility for a strong NATO</i>

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 exceptions⁸ – 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 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 established⁹ – 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.

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).

⁹ These groups were devoted to: defense against WMD (works coordinated by Czech Rep.), air and missile defense modernisation (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.

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 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 nation¹¹. 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 arrangements¹². 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

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

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 Bodnářová, “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.

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 2009 and launching of Multinational Aviation Training Center in Feb. 2013¹³. 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 cooperation¹⁵.

However, most of the projects discussed until the end of 2013 had serious limitations. First of all, majority of them functioned rather

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>.

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, 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 cooperation¹⁶.

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

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 from the outside. Cf. Marian Majer, ed., “DAV4 III Expert Group Report: From Bullets to Supersonics: V4 on the Brink of Industrial Cooperation” (Centre for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Democracy, 2015), 7–9.

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 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 partners¹⁷.

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* basis¹⁸. 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 projects¹⁹.

The last document, *Memorandum on V4 Battle Group*, reiterated

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>.

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.

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 ambitious and engaging V4 project on operational level²⁰.

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 security²¹. On the other hand, substantial differences were already present in their

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.

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 crisis²².

Nevertheless, meeting in Visegrad in March 2014, instead of spurring the V4 defense cooperation further, ultimately turned out 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 tender²³. 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

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>.

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

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 Group²⁵. There were no substantial results of various initiatives on cyberdefense. Although it was initially judged as relatively easy task to 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 Grippens, Slovakia ultimately decided to order 14 F-16s from the US, with the delivery date in 2023²⁷.

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

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 modernisation 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 Gluszcak, "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>.

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)

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 European capabilities or factor that should stimulate V4 defense cooperation in other fields²⁸.

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 procurement²⁹. 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 agenda³⁰. Quite the contrary, both declarations, as it was rightly noted by Milan Nić,

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>.

seems to be rather some kind of “ticking the box” exercise, since the prime ministers actually discussed defense cooperation very briefly and in inconclusive way³¹. 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 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

³¹ Nič, “Visegrad Defense Cooperation: Doomed to Fail or Survive?” 2.

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 purpose³².

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 it³³. Moreover, profound dependency of Hungary and Slovakia on

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

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, 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 Paks³⁴.

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 propaganda³⁵, in relations with particular Visegrad capitals Russian approach was more nuanced, with the “sticks” offered to “recalcitrant” like Poland³⁶ and carrots given to more

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 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.”

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*

“sympathetic” partners like Hungary³⁷. 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 Moscow³⁸.

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 than respective values of all remaining V4 even taken together (see table 2). That could continuously hamper their

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>.

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 To the 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>.

defense cooperation, particularly on technical, operational and industrial level³⁹.

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

	Year	Poland	Czech Rep.	Hungary	Slovakia
Defense expenditure (million 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 (million 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 (million 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

³⁹ For more see Madej, “Visegrad Group Defense Cooperation.”

Defense expenditure (million 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 (million USD)*	2018**	11 856	2 746	1 791	1 297
Def. exp. as a GDP share		2.02	1.12	1.15	1.22
GDP		542	206	138	97
Defense expenditure (million 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_06/20190625_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 Units⁴¹), in the aftermath of Warsaw

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/>.

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 Presence⁴² as well as expanding NATO command structure on its territory (enlargement of already existing Multinational Corps North East – MNC NE in Szczecin, establishment of additional Multinational Division North East – MND NE in Elblag). 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 area⁴³, 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 Slovaks 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

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>.

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>.

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 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 effort⁴⁵. 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

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/>.

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 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 endeavours. 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, it was a manifestation of pragmatism and generally rational choice, but which also shows rather slim chances for a substantial change and improvement in future.

The Visegrad Group Countries Representation in the European Parliament

Jakub Charvát

Introduction

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.

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 reopened 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 1998³ 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 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").

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>.

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 analyse 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 i.e., it is neither aimed at defending or criticising 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

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.

relevant provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon⁶ and related.⁷ The analytical framework for measuring Member States representation in the European Parliament at the individual level is then 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 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

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)".

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

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	14	19	41	43	51	62	73	78	73	75
		2	8	0	4	8	6	2	5	6	1

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 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

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.

¹¹ “Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union” Art. 9); Art. 14 (2).

proportional representation, which is further emphasised 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.

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

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).

(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

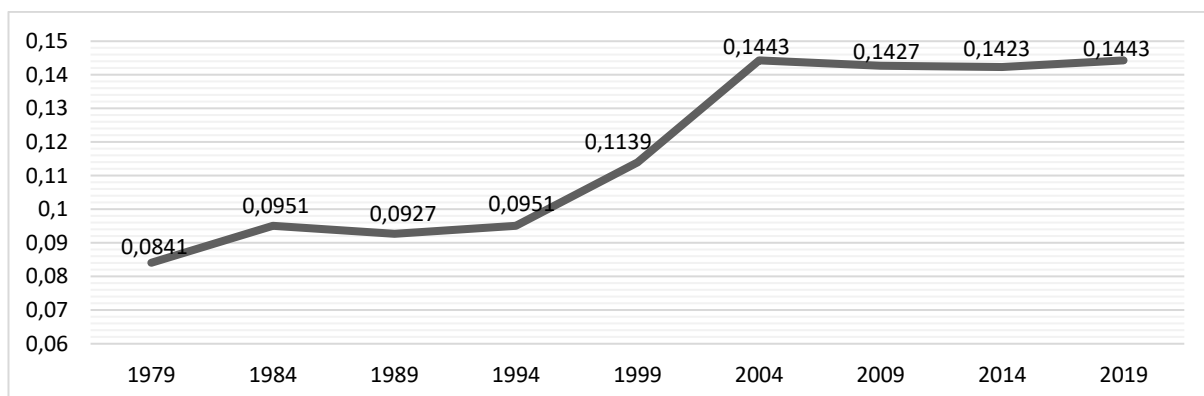
The analysis of malapportionment in the European elections at the aggregate level shows that the distortion of proportional representation has stabilised at about 14 per cent¹⁶ since the largest (Eastern) enlargement of the European Union in 2004 (see Figure 1). This is equivalent to about 105 (in 2009) 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

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

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	
Malta	399867	79973	7,8421	410926	82185	8,2310	429424	71570	9,4328	493559	82260	8,3118	Malta
Luxembourg	454960	75826	8,2710	493500	82250	8,2245	549680	91613	7,3692	613894	102316	6,6826	Luxembourg
Cyprus	722893	120482	5,2054	796930	132821	5,0930	858000	143000	4,7211	875898	145983	4,6836	Cyprus
Estonia	1366250	227708	2,7542	1335740	222623	3,0386	1315819	219303	3,0784	1324820	220803	3,0966	Estonia
Latvia	2276520	252946	2,4794	2162834	270354	2,5021	2061085	257635	2,6204	1919968	239996	2,8489	Latvia
Slovenia	1996433	285204	2,1990	2032362	290337	2,3299	2001468	250183	2,6985	2080908	260114	2,6286	Slovenia
Lithuania	3398929	261456	2,3987	3183856	265321	2,5496	2943472	267588	2,5230	2794184	254017	2,6917	Lithuania
Croatia	X	X	X	X	X	X	4246809	386073	1,7487	4076246	370568	1,8451	Croatia
Ireland	4028851	309911	2,0237	4521322	376776	1,7954	4637852	421622	1,6012	4904226	445839	1,5336	Ireland
Slovakia	5371875	383705	1,6345	5382401	414030	1,6338	5415949	416611	1,6205	5450421	419263	1,6308	Slovakia
Finland	5219732	372838	1,6821	5326314	409716	1,6511	5451270	419328	1,6100	5517919	424455	1,6108	Finland
Denmark	5397640	385545	1,6267	5511451	423957	1,5956	5627235	432864	1,5596	5806081	446622	1,5309	Denmark
Bulgaria	X	X	X	7467119	439242	1,5401	7245677	426216	1,5840	7000039	411767	1,6605	Bulgaria
Austria	8142573	452365	1,3894	8335003	490294	1,3797	8507786	472654	1,4283	8858775	492154	1,3893	Austria
Hungary	10116742	421530	1,4878	10030975	455953	1,4836	9877365	470350	1,4353	9772756	456369	1,4692	Hungary
Sweden	8975670	472403	1,3276	9256347	514421	1,3155	9644864	482243	1,3999	10230185	511509	1,3367	Sweden
Portugal	10473050	436377	1,4372	10563014	480137	1,4089	10427301	496538	1,3596	10276617	489363	1,3972	Portugal
Czechia	10195347	424806	1,4763	10425783	473899	1,4274	10512419	500591	1,3486	10649800	507133	1,3482	Czechia
Greece	11037745	459906	1,3637	11190654	508666	1,3299	10925807	520276	1,2976	10722287	510585	1,3391	Greece
Belgium	10396421	433184	1,4478	10753080	488776	1,3840	11180840	534420	1,2680	11467923	546092	1,2520	Belgium
Netherlands	16258032	602149	1,0415	16485787	659431	1,0258	16829289	647280	1,0430	17282163	664699	1,0286	Netherlands
Romania	X	X	X	20440290	619402	1,0921	19947311	623353	1,0830	19401658	606302	1,1277	Romania
Poland	38190608	707233	0,8868	38135876	762717	0,8869	38017856	745448	0,9056	37972812	744565	0,9183	Poland
Spain	42547451	737126	0,8508	46239273	924785	0,7315	46512199	861337	0,7838	46934632	869160	0,7867	Spain
Italy	57495900	787915	0,7960	59000586	819452	0,8256	60782668	832639	0,8108	60359546	826843	0,8269	Italy

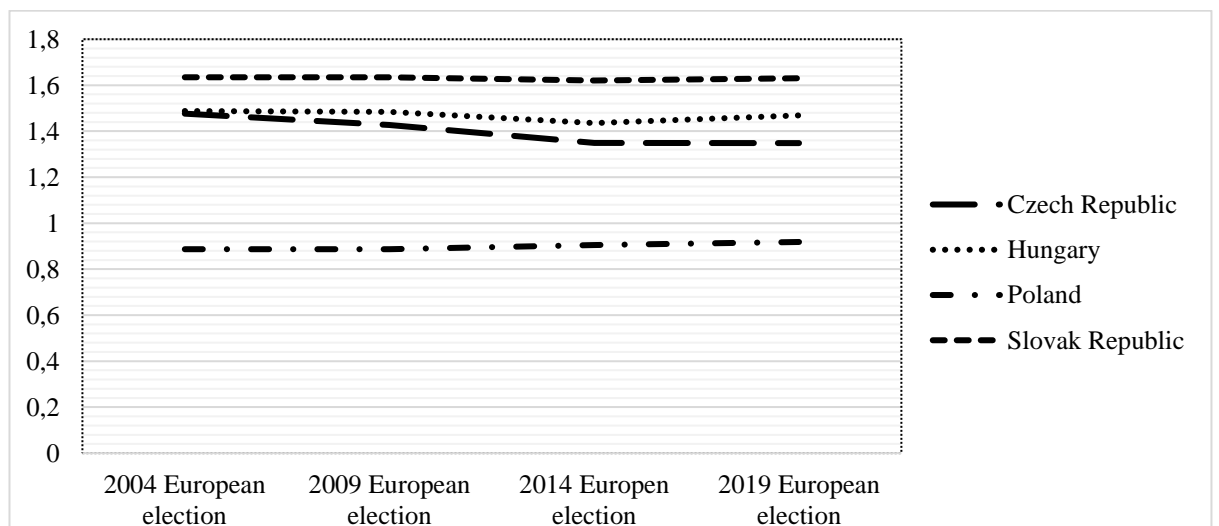
U.K.	59793759	766586	0,8181	62042343	861699	0,7850	64351155	881522	0,7658	66647112	912974	0,7489	U.K.
France	62292241	798618	0,7853	64350226	893753	0,7569	65942267	891111	0,7576	67028048	905784	0,7548	France
Germany	82531671	833653	0,7523	82002356	828306	0,8167	80767463	841327	0,8024	83019213	864783	0,7906	Germany
EU 28	<i>MAL</i> = 0,1444 (~ 106 seats)			<i>MAL</i> = 0,1427 (~ 105 seats)			<i>MAL</i> = 0,1423 (~ 107 seats)			<i>MAL</i> = 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	<i>PR model</i>	reality	<i>PR model</i>	reality	<i>PR model</i>	reality	<i>PR model</i>
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.

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Political System and Political Identity in Central–Eastern Europe

Baranyi Tamás Péter

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

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

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 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

(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.

⁴ Bozóki András, “A magyar demokratikus ellenzék: önreflexió, identitás és politikai diskurzus,” *Politikatudományi Szemle* 19, no. 2 (2010): 7–45.

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 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

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>.

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.

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 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 Czechoslovakia 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 Party, with former Finance Minister, Václav Klaus as the new Head of Government. Thereafter, tensions emerged between Klaus and the group of Slovak nationalists centred around Vladimír Mečiar. Klaus argued in favour of a “working federation” between the Czech and Slovak part of the country, while Mečiar 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 favour 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 centre-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,” though 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

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

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 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,

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

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.

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 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 postcommunist 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

¹¹ Bottoni Stefano, *A várva várt Nyugat: Kelet-Európa története 1944-től napjainkig* (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, 2015), 230–232.

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.

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 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 Rapacki Plan was aiming at the gradual denuclearization of Central Europe which was a regional endeavour 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

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,

Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, just like those of its neighbouring 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 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 neighbourhood 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 mould 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 neighbours.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,

Sipos Balázs, and Zeidler Miklós (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat, 2006), 158, <https://mek.oszk.hu/05200/05284/05284.pdf>.

¹⁶ Erdődy Gábor, “‘A földrajz ellen sok mindent lehet tenni, kivéve politizálni.’ Antall József a rendszerváltozás nemzetközi feltételrendszeréről,” in *Háborúk, békek, terroristák. Székely Gábor 70 éves.*, ed. Majoros István et al. (Budapest: ELTE, Új- és Jelenkori Egyetemes Történelmi Tanszék, 2012), 115–28.

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 become 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 “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

¹⁷ Judt, *Postwar*, 715–723.

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” economies. 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 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 centre 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 neighbourhood 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

¹⁸ Costas Lapavistas, “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>.

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>.

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 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

²¹ Tamás Péter Baranyi et al., “China and the V4 Region,” *AJTK Working Paper*, December 7, 2016.

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>.

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 weak 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 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.